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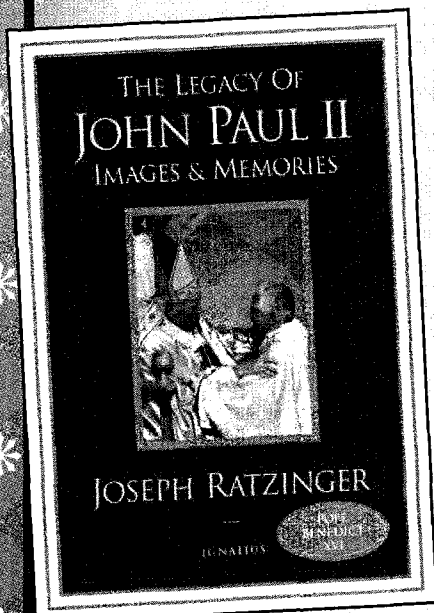
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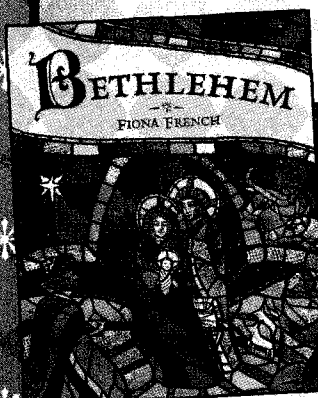
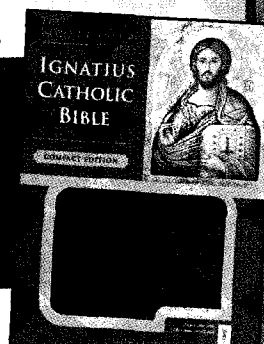
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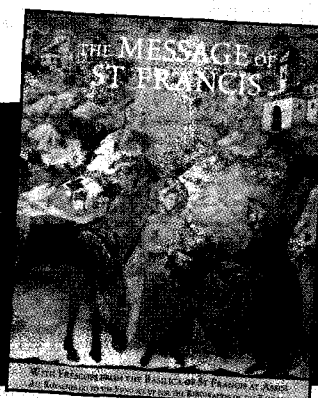
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the abolition of their Judeo-Christian heritage, which is reportedly evident in the constitution they have written for the union of European states. The United States currently has more than three thousand inmates on death row because so many citizens are reluctant to be hard-nosed about capital punishment for murderers of the first degree. Some day the financial outlay for the support of these murderers may be questioned: What does society profit by maintaining room, board, and hospitalization costs in the millions and billions for these murderers? Absolutely nothing, except the indulgence of the tender-hearted feelings of the sentimentalists. In time there must be once again a recognition of the fact that the worst crime a human being can commit is to plot, scheme and plan the murder of one or more innocent fellow human beings—and that the only just punishment is life for life.

Leland D. Peterson
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia

Joseph Bottum dismisses several common objections to capital punishment and then tries to give a real Christian rationale against executions. His argument seems to hinge on the idea that capital punishment is so extreme and so different from all other punishments that it necessarily falls in the category of “high justice”—an attempt to “balance the cosmic books”—an authority which the state cannot rightly wield. Bottum argues that capital crime is not an offense the state can rectify: To do so would be to make an idol of the state, believing it able to do things it cannot. He compares this to the idea of the divine right of kings, which has no place in a modern democracy.

Bottum misses, however, the real point of capital punishment. John Locke, in his second treatise on government, gives the definition of political power as “the right of making laws with the penalty of death, and

consequently all lesser punishments, for the regulating and preserving property.” Property, in Locke’s view, meant everything God has given, that is, “life, health, liberty, and possessions.” The state exists to protect the individual’s life, liberty and property, and the state is given power by the people’s consent to enforce that protection with external punishments, including death of the evildoer.

Locke’s words were echoed eloquently in the Declaration of Independence, which is the foundational document for modern democratic republics. In Locke’s view, the authority to execute the evildoer is not to satisfy any mythic notion of high justice. It is to protect the life, liberty, and property of the individual, created in God’s image, from those who would rob him or her of these things. It is to restrain evil in those who will not restrain themselves.

Bottum seems to imply that treason is a different case that may justify capital punishment. But it is an insidious notion that there is some intrinsic value in the state that justifies the state’s self-defense. The state has no such value in the order of creation. It exists solely to protect the individual, and our loyalty to the state is simply the sum of our love and respect for all those individuals living under its authority. In actuality, treason is not different than any other capital crime. Treason may be punishable by death not because it attacks the state, but because it undermines the state’s ability to protect its citizens, particularly from foreign attacks.

We might question whether execution is always the most effective and fair means toward the end of protecting its citizens, and there may be many who misunderstand the purpose of the death penalty, construing it to be more than it really is. But this does not negate the right of the state. The authority to institute capital punishment is based on a high concept of the human identity and a

very realistic concept of how perverse humans may become. Murder is serious stuff with God, and the state has the responsibility to deal with it seriously.

Kelley Vincent
Tyler, Texas

Joseph Bottum argues that since our society is infected by a culture of death, we should prudentially end (or postpone?) executions until life is respected again. In other words, justice should counter the law-abiding public’s mindset. One could as well argue that opposing a culture of relativism requires adherence to unchanging principles of justice. But is deterring the public from wrong attitudes more important than countering criminal behavior? As one who sat on a jury in a murder case in a state that is not shy about executions, I am aware of how important it is to make sure the right person is convicted. There may be a case for demanding a higher standard of proof before imposing the death penalty, but the right to impose it has never been abrogated.

Ralph Gillmann
Burke, Virginia

I read Joseph Bottum’s essay on capital punishment with admiration and bemusement. Naturally, it was well-written and thoughtful, but it does not seem to embrace the wider conversation about this complex, troubling issue. By exercising the divinely mandated prerogative to take the life of convicted murderers, the state neither makes itself into an idol nor cancels the possibility for individual repentance.

While a state guided by a “culture of life” should clearly resort to the death penalty only very rarely, when it does, given proper judicial safeguards, it makes a temporal statement about a crime, leaving the final judgment of that soul to God alone. And when one thinks about it, how could it ever affect a judgment that

lies so infinitely beyond its power to change?

Michael J. Ortiz
Boyd, Maryland

According to Joseph Bottum, the “sword” that St. Paul mentions in Romans 13 is “a metaphor for police powers that does not necessarily imply approval of the death penalty.” But why *this* metaphor? It is common for ancient authors to refer to beheading and the sword even when many of those they are speaking of were executed by other means. Thus the Book of Revelation speaks of the first resurrection of those who have been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus—referring to the Neronian martyrs, many of whom were, in fact, burned or crucified. And Tertullian, who full well knew what kind of deaths they underwent, said of Nero that he persecuted Christians “with the utmost fury of the imperial sword.”

So yes, the sword is a metaphor for police powers, but a metaphor that places capital punishment at the top of the list of those powers and justifies the exercise of those powers starting at the top. If we are going to say that the death of Jesus Christ has overcome and transformed the commandment to Noah that those who kill men should themselves be killed, so that we no longer have to do this, we cannot use St. Paul as our ally, as he clearly believed no such thing.

Theodore W. Volckhausen
New York, New York

Joseph Bottum quotes the passage in *Evangelium Vitae* where John Paul II states that the death penalty should be “very rare and practically non-existent.” He contextualizes the Holy Father’s assertion with another excerpt from the 1995 encyclical, where the pope says, “The problem must be viewed in the context of a system of penal justice ever more in line with human dignity and thus, in the end, with God’s plan for man and

society. The primary purpose of the punishment which society inflicts is to redress the disorder caused by the offense.”

The application of these principles in the United States would be relatively easy if the criminal justice system operated such that those guilty of capital crimes remained behind bars for life. The “disorder” caused by these lawbreakers would be redressed (to the extent humanly possible), and the offenders would, in all likelihood, pose no further danger to the innocent.

But such is not always the case. All too frequently in contemporary American society, a sentence of “life” means something far less than “for the remainder of one’s time on this earth.” I am not a supporter of the death penalty, but I do understand the fears of those who are deeply distressed by the machinations of judges and lawyers within the current legal structure—machinations that sometimes lead to the early (and unwise) release of those who have long since forfeited their gift of freedom.

Bottum rightly notes that “circumstances alone dictate when capital punishment is necessary for a government’s self-defense and the preservation of social order.” Even though our modern prisons are relatively safe and secure, a case can be made that the present condition of the legal system justifies the use of the death penalty, since lesser punishments do not guarantee the “government’s self-defense and [the] preservation of social order.” It should thus be obvious that legal and penal reforms are necessary pre-conditions for the eventual elimination of the death penalty. Without them, many concerned Americans will turn a deaf ear to current Catholic teaching on capital punishment as enshrined in *Evangelium Vitae* and the 1996 version of the Catechism.

The Rev. Raymond N. Suriani
St. Pius X Catholic Church
Westerly, Rhode Island

Joseph Bottum replies:

I am a little surprised by the outpouring of letters rejecting my Christian and conservative case against the death penalty—which is to say, I am not startled by the letter-writers’ objections in themselves, for I may well be wrong in my argument, but I am disturbed by the nearly universal support for capital punishment expressed along the way. Each of the letters published here represents many other letters to *FIRST THINGS* making similar points, and a great number of them were genuinely angry. R. Scott Pennington is a typical case, insisting in his letter that the Catholic Church is a “defective faith” because it has turned against the death penalty.

This simply will not do. There are several things on which Christian faith stands or falls, but support for capital punishment is not one of them. I am sorely tempted to say that it runs, in fact, in the other direction: If you’re a Christian, you *ought* to be made uncomfortable by the shedding of blood, even for the best of reasons. It may need to be done on occasion—there are such things as just wars, after all, and the state’s obligation to defend the social order may necessitate an execution—but Pennington’s sort of blithe assumption of justice done in the death of another human being makes me tremble. Since when is a well-contented conscience, as over-easy as an egg, the mark of a Christian?

My old friend Peter J. Leithart joins Tony Montanaro, Gary Inbinder, and Kelley Vincent to argue—each for different reasons—against my worries about the implicit claims of authority made when modern democratic states employ the death penalty. Several times I used the phrase “cosmic justice” to speak of the poetic and metaphysical levels at which the death penalty seeks to operate, and perhaps that phrase was unhelpful. As the philosopher Russell Hittinger recently pointed out to

me, we lack in ordinary discourse these days the vocabulary to speak of a morally interconnected universe in which great events and great disturbances are echoed even across the stars.

That makes it all the stranger that we still attempt cosmic stories with the death penalty, but Hittinger suggested some phrase like “historical justice” might make the same point and fall more easily on contemporary ears. In any case, what I intended was this: Where beside the death penalty are criminals sentenced to their crime? No American court orders assailants to be punched, or tax cheats to be defrauded, or rapists to be raped.

We send criminals to jail instead to achieve social justice, and their sentences are deliberately measured in time behind bars: Offenders must be withdrawn from society for a period sufficient to allow them to realize the wrongness of their actions—and sufficient to protect society from them until they learn that lesson. Meanwhile, with the just *punishment* of incarceration, we reestablish social order and repress private vengeance. Along the way, we also instruct ordinary citizens about the general majesty of the law and the particular evil of the criminal’s offense.

By executing murderers, we are trying to tell a different story: a story with poetic closure, a tale of punishment that fits the crime. When the state imposes prison or fines, it acts as the agent and enforcer of normal social justice, with powers derived from and limited by the social contract of its citizens. When the state sets out to kill a killer, it becomes instead an actor in a drama about righteous vengeance. Under any Christian account of political theory, how does a modern democracy gain authority to act on this high level?

My article made note of old claims about the divine right of kings, not because I imagine such claims were true even in their own time, but

because they at least offered a theory about why the state is justified in exercising power over life and death. When, in the great movement of modern liberalism, we demythologized the state and rejected most of the metaphysical foundations of politics, we gained much—but we also lost something, and one of the things we lost is any coherent theory about the nation’s continuing authority to enact such metaphysically fitting punishments as the death penalty.

“Jesus turned all our stories inside out,” I wrote, “especially the old, old ones about blood and blood’s repayment.” In his letter Bryce Sibley suggests that this requires me to reject not just the death penalty but just-war theory as well.

But I do not oppose the death penalty in quite the way he means, for I noted that one can imagine in certain extreme cases the need for executions in the order of social justice. And for exactly the same reason I accept the need for war in certain extreme cases in the international order. No modern democracy can march to war for “high cosmic justice,” but other reasons may exist and identifying those is the task of just-war theory.

Cary Kozberg, Theodore W. Volckhausen, and Peter J. Leithart each examined my use of scripture, and I thank them for their intelligent and learned remarks.

We could quibble here about the difference between, say, the Roman Empire (which claimed divine establishment, in however confused and pagan a way) and modern judicial systems (which explicitly reject any appeal to the state’s religious foundations). But I take my correspondents’ point that Romans 13 and Genesis 9 are strong texts. All I ask is that we read them with three questions in mind: (1) Do they *demand* the death penalty be imposed by all legitimate states?, (2) Do they empower with life and death all possible political systems equally?, and (3) Is there any

reasonable reading in which they can be understood as speaking of what states do at the level of ordinary social justice?

In his letter Gregory T. Walker asks me to take my analysis and “try telling that to the victims.” This is indeed a problem, but exactly the reverse of what he imagines. The weakening of the distinction between torts and crimes, between harms done individuals and harms done society, is one of the most disturbing trends in American law, and it threatens a great deal of the political theory upon which this nation depends.

When we defend the social order, we are doing the proper criminal justice of the state. When we seek instead to “pay something back to the victims and bring them closure,” we are doing a justice either lower (as in civil-court cases) or higher (as in repaying blood with blood)—but, in any case, something that should not be a model for how we deal with criminals.

Here, I think, John Paul II’s joining of abortion with the death penalty in *Evangelium Vitae* is exactly right: A culture that cannot bring itself to rescind its license of murder in the womb is unlikely to understand the proper ways in which justice should be done. The Gospel of life is hard to preach in a culture of death, but eliminating capital punishment is one thing that may help.

Stemming the Tide of Cloning

In her article “Stem Cells and Babies” (August/September), Maureen Condic outlines a variation of cloning that she and her colleagues hope will produce the equivalent of embryonic stem cells—while bypassing the production of an actual human embryo, thus overcoming intrinsic moral problems entailed in embryonic stem cells for research.

Condic and her colleagues propose a procedure, called “oocyte-

assisted reprogramming" (OAR), which they claim will produce a pluripotent cell without first producing a totipotent zygote, the single-cell embryo. The details, however, show that OAR *would* produce an embryo—albeit one that would be incapable of developing normally.

Condic's definition of the pluripotent embryonic stem cell is not fully accurate. She states that such cells are "specialized cells that have limited developmental capabilities." According to the National Institutes of Health's definition, however, pluripotent embryonic stem cells are "the embryonic source of all cells of the body." The NIH defines totipotent cells as the source of both embryonic stem cells and of trophoblast cells which give rise to extra-embryonic tissues such as the placenta. Thus the only difference between totipotent and pluripotent cells is that totipotent cells divide and differentiate into both embryonic stem cells and trophoblast cells. Pluripotent cells divide into more embryonic stem cells until they are ready to differentiate, later on in embryonic development.

OAR produces a crippled embryo—one whose cells can divide and differentiate to a certain stage in embryonic development and no further. The OAR proposal uses a variation of therapeutic cloning called altered nuclear transfer (ANT) in which the nucleus of a donor cell (a skin cell, for example), containing the 30,000 genes of the genetic code, is altered in such a way that it produces an epigenetic factor, a protein called nanog.

OAR proponents claim that when the altered donor-cell nucleus with its activated nanog gene is transferred to the enucleated oocyte (egg cell), the presence of nanog will immediately convert the enucleated egg cell to a pluripotent cell, without ever forming a zygote.

The conclusion that no zygote is formed is not correct. Nanog appears

in both the morula (12-cell stage) and in high concentration at an advanced stage of normal embryonic development, the blastocyst (150-cell stage). The blastocyst contains both embryonic stem cells and trophoblast cells. Because a pluripotent embryonic stem cell cannot differentiate into a trophoblast cell, the blastocyst must have differentiated into these two cell types from a totipotent cell (the zygote). Therefore nanog does not block the early embryonic development of the zygote. Nanog is said to act at a later stage of development to keep cells in an undifferentiated state. But a short-lived embryo is still an embryo.

Another serious flaw in the OAR proponents' hypothesis is its assumption that the technician's reprogramming of the nucleus of the donor-cell nucleus to direct the synthesis of nanog would assure the formation of a pluripotent cell and never a zygote. This hypothesis underestimates the opposing power of the egg cell cytoplasm to reprogram the genes in the donor-cell nucleus.

For instance, the egg-cell cytoplasm strips off all of the many epigenetic factors which differentiate a genetically restricted donor skin cell from a totipotent zygote. The term "oocyte assisted reprogramming" suggests that the egg cell will merely assist in reprogramming. It is far more likely, however, that the egg-cell cytoplasm with its stripping factor will reprogram all the genetic material including the alterations made in the donor nucleus that were intended to prevent the creation of the zygote. The OAR proponents' claim that that the egg-cell cytoplasm will remove all of the many epigenetic factors restricting genes of a skin cell, but not just one more epigenetic factor, nanog, is not credible.

Perhaps the most dangerous ethical leap made by OAR proponents is that science, by itself, can answer the critical ethical question: Does the zygote exist, for even a short time,

during the OAR procedure? Proponents claim that this is merely a technical question and that experiments on rats and mice will give us the answer. If these experiments support their hypothesis, they will be able to go on to similar human-cloning experiments because, according to OAR proponents, there is no moral issue left to be determined.

There are limits to certainty in biology, however. For instance, the claim that nanog is not detected in the zygote, using a specific biological procedure, is not the same as certainty that it is absent. Due to the limited statistical and methodological certainty allowed by biological science, the occurrence of technical errors in biological experiments, the differences between human and animal embryo development, the rapidity by which the cloning procedure produces a totipotent zygote, and the philosophical and theological nature of the question, there is no biological experiment that will prove with moral certainty that a human zygote never exists during the OAR procedure.

Therefore, biological science will never provide the moral certainty required to answer the critical moral question. Yet a mistaken judgment by scientists, that OAR works in mice, could lead authorities in the Catholic Church to the decision to approve creating crippled human embryos for research.

Finally, there is a broader ethical problem with OAR. Like *in-vitro* fertilization, the OAR procedure would take a component of human reproduction, the oocyte or egg cell. OAR then uses it in a cloning procedure that would be otherwise immoral if used on humans. Either activating or blocking the expression of a gene in the cloning procedure in order to prevent the development of a zygote might sound like a moral advance.

We do not think a similar alteration in the genetic material used in

in-vitro fertilization would make the process of *in-vitro* fertilization moral. Similarly, we do not think this alteration in cloning makes it any more morally acceptable. A combination of wrongs cannot make the end result good.

William J. Burke
Professor of Neurology
Saint Louis University
Medical Center

Patrick Pullicino
Chair of the Department of
Neurology and Neurosciences
University of Medicine and
Dentistry of New Jersey

The Rev. Edward J. Richard
Associate Professor of
Moral Theology
Kenrick Glennon Seminary

Maureen Condic replies:

The letter by William J. Burke, Patrick Pullicino, and Father Edward J. Richard raises two biological objections, and two more general objections, to ANT-OAR. First, the authors focus on a protein, the transcription factor nanog, and assert that because it “does not block the early embryonic development of the zygote,” therefore ANT-OAR “produces a crippled embryo.” This assertion is both misleading and scientifically unsupported.

The experiment of manipulating nanog expression as part of ANT-OAR has not yet been done. It is therefore impossible to know what effect this manipulation will have. While nanog is weakly expressed in the late morula, it is clear that nanog expression is rapidly restricted to the cells of the inner-cell mass. Thus, in biological terms, nanog is a good marker of the pluripotent state, and may well prove to be sufficient to induce this state. Animal experiments will resolve the question of what manipulating nanog can accomplish, and until then, unsupported and inflammatory assertions about pro-

ducing “a crippled embryo” do not contribute to a reasoned debate.

The second biological objection is that “the egg-cell cytoplasm” will “reprogram all the genetic material including the alterations made in the donor nucleus that were intended to prevent the creation of the zygote.” This objection is, for the lack of a better name, nothing more than “egg mysticism”: the belief that eggs are somehow so potently driven to create zygotes that no scientific manipulation will prove capable of deflecting the egg from its preordained path.

The notion that oocytes are beyond the realm of scientific manipulation is absurd. Eggs are cells. Like all cells, they are subject to the rules of biology. Many thousands of experiments have proven beyond any reasonable doubt that the imagined insurmountable “power of the egg-cell cytoplasm to reprogram genes” can be readily overcome by standard manipulations of molecular biology. Indeed, because eggs are large cells that are relatively easy to manipulate, they are one of the favored cell types used by biologists to express foreign genes and to test gene function. It is nonsensical to suggest that by some mystical mechanism the egg will prevent a controlled manipulation of gene expression.

Both of the scientific objections raised by the authors miss the point of the ANT-OAR proposal. The proposal is not linked to manipulation of a specific gene (such as the much-maligned nanog), but rather to a conceptual approach designed to yield a specific outcome. The clearly stated goal of ANT-OAR is *categorically* to prevent formation of an embryo, even “a short-lived embryo,” which everyone agrees “is still an embryo.” Should, as the authors fear, the expression of a single factor prove insufficient to promote the direct formation of pluripotent stem cells there are multiple other factors to try—either singly or in combination.

The third and ostensibly most serious objection is that biological experiments cannot provide moral certainty. This objection, however, is universally true for the entire field of biomedical science. Even the most well-tested drugs can (and occasionally do) kill patients for reasons that are impossible to predict. All medicines are potentially fatal. We cannot have moral certainty that a specific drug is safe, we can only have *reasonable* certainty.

Surely, as physicians, Burke and Pullicino would not insist that the entire field of medicine must be abandoned because there are no biological experiments that prove with moral certainty the doctor will “do no harm” in administering a potentially fatal drug to a patient.

The authors conclude by raising what they consider to be “a broader ethical problem with OAR,” stating that this procedure amounts to nothing more than human cloning with the additional twist of introducing a genetic mutation—ominously concluding that a “combination of wrongs cannot make the end result good.” Far from raising a broad ethical problem, this argument is both specious and circular: First the ANT-OAR procedure is incorrectly defined as “cloning,” and then it is condemned because it is cloning.

The explicit goal of ANT-OAR is to produce a cell that is not an embryo. If successful, this procedure can no more be considered cloning than establishing a colony of skin cells can be considered cloning. In both cases, cells derived from an adult individual are maintained in the laboratory under conditions where the cells replicate (or “clone” themselves).

But in neither case are these cells capable of generating another complete human being. No embryo has been generated, no organism “cloned” if ANT-OAR succeeds in its goal of producing nothing other than pluripotent stem cells.

As I stated in my original article, prior to conducting experiments with human cells, ANT-OAR techniques would need to be rigorously tested in animal models to establish a procedure that guarantees with reasonable certainty that an embryo is not generated. Realistically, what level of certainty is possible for this technique? Are there criteria that could be met to establish beyond reasonable doubt that ANT-OAR does not produce a human embryo, even a very short-lived embryo? I believe the answer is "yes."

Embryos are different from mere cell cultures in a number of important ways. Single-cell embryos have a unique pattern of gene expression that is characteristic of a zygote and not of any other cell type. Zygotes generate specific types of cells in an orderly progression. The heterogeneous progeny of the zygote interact in a coordinated manner to generate new cell types and to form organized multicellular structures.

Many entities that are not embryos (teratomas, parthenotes, complete hydatidiform moles, and even enucleated oocytes) resemble embryos to varying degrees and yet can be reliably distinguished from embryos by careful comparison. The ANT-OAR cell would need to be compared to a normal embryo on multiple criteria, and the results of this comparison carefully considered.

In the clearest possible case, the ANT-OAR cell would differ from a zygote on all of the parameters noted above: The ANT-OAR cell would have a pattern of gene expression that is clearly distinct from a zygote; it would generate a homogeneous population of cells rather than multiple cell types; it would undergo simple cleavage divisions and not produce any multicellular structures.

If this ideal situation proved to be consistently the case in animal experiments, then there would be near-absolute certainty that the cells pro-

duced by ANT-OAR are merely cells and not embryos.

If such crystal clarity is not achieved, yet the ANT-OAR cell consistently meets the criteria we currently use to distinguish confidently between teratomas and embryos, we would still have reasonable certainty that ANT-OAR generates cells, and not embryos.

While those espousing "egg mysticism" may continue to wring their hands and express doubts that the magical properties they attribute to the egg have not been fully overcome, such doubts are not reasonable doubts and would not constitute a legitimate moral indictment of ANT-OAR.

Forever Young?

I have read Frederica Mathewes-Green's "Against Eternal Youth" (August/September), and I must admit to being flabbergasted. Mathewes-Green believes that Baby Boomers' parents shielded their children from the trials of adult life, making us unwilling to grow up and assume our adult roles in society. That was not my experience growing up in the 1950s.

In my experience, many Boomers' parents exposed them to a very unpleasant picture of adulthood. In my formative years, I saw excessive use of alcohol and tobacco by adults who were self-absorbed, bored with life, and, in fact, not very interested in their children.

Perhaps other factors are at work in producing the societal ills mentioned in the article. Maybe we should look at some of those institutions thought to be helpful in forming the character of our youth: the arts and religion, for example. A movie industry that affirms adolescent fantasies and churches that preach a politically correct gospel might be a part of the problem.

Anthony Migler
Camarillo, California

At age twenty-nine, with two graduate degrees but no wife, I am the perfect target for Frederica Mathewes-Green's disappointment with the rising age of marriage. She notes that "fifty years ago, when the average bride was twenty, the divorce rate was half what it is now." Later marriage, she says, does not result in a more thoughtful choice of mate, but discourages us from treating marriage as a lifelong commitment.

The statistics are a bit more complicated, however. Today, as Mathewes-Green notes, half of all men marry by age 27.1 and half of all women by 25.3. That is significantly different from fifty years ago, when median age at first marriage was 22.8 for men and 20.3 for women.

But the 1950s were the low-age decade for both sexes. In 1890—the earliest year for which we have reliable data—the median marrying ages were 26.1 and 22.0 for men and women, respectively. These averages fell throughout the first half of the twentieth century, then rose again during the second half. A stable, "correct" age for marriage simply doesn't exist. The existing data on divorce do not appear to support the theory that late marriage contributes to an increased divorce rate. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, brides who are at least twenty-five years old are 40 percent less likely to divorce or separate than women who marry in their teens.

Mathewes-Green's response, presumably, would be that a society that weds young has strong marriages, while an individual who marries young in a late-marrying culture is at risk. The standard caution applies: Correlation does not necessarily imply causation. Age at marriage *may* be a risk factor with respect to divorce, but perhaps the more valid conclusion is in the opposite direction, that high divorce rates scare couples away from early marriage.

William E. Woodward
Arlington, Virginia

Frederica Mathewes-Green replies:

I am grateful for Anthony Migler's comments, which allow me to restate a subtle point. The general rule was a separation of child and adult worlds, and a fantasy that childhood is wonderful and adulthood is miserable. This does not mean our childhoods were, in fact, wonderful; adult misery has a tendency to leak. Nor did it mean all adults were amused by or even interested in children; much more than today, adults socialized with other adults, rather than enjoying the company of their children. (Think of the adults-only bridge clubs and cocktail parties, rare among Boomer parents, who are much closer to their own children.)

My point was that an artificial division, a "generation gap," was established between childhood and adulthood. Yet no way was provided for a young person to get across that gap and attain recognized adult status, no "rite of passage." Given the relentless emphasis on the negatives of adulthood, there was little reason to want to attain it. It is a cautionary tale for those who idealize the *Ozzie and Harriet* 1950s.

William E. Woodward's comments are also welcome. Yes, the point was that we have gotten estranged from what physical maturity would tell us about the age for marriage. Look even beyond the nineteenth century and think about pre-modern society. In terms of biology and maturity, there is no reason teen marriage could not succeed, if the culture expects and supports it. But we are presently in a culture so estranged from our bodies, and male-female relationships are in such an overall mess (with sex redefined in terms of power rather than vulnerability), that it is hard to know where to start.

I chose to start with the idea of encouraging a return to early marriage, because it restores us to body-logic, and because it is inherently a delightful and cheering idea. The

goal, obviously, would be a culture-wide reaffirmation of young marriage. Unfortunately, this can only begin when isolated young couples take the risk and go against the tide.

The Roe Effect

To be fair to Levitt and Dubner, authors of *Freakonomics*, they make the same point as Richard John Neuhaus does ("While We're At It," August/September) about the moral implications of eliminating potential criminals in order to reduce crime. After making the case that they believe establishes a link between the rise in abortions in the 1970s and the falling crime rates of the 1990s, they say, "It feels less Darwinian than Swiftian; it calls to mind a long-ago dart attributed to G. K. Chesterton: when there aren't enough hats to go around, the problem isn't solved by lopping off some heads." They say further that even if one does not equate a fetus with a child, as long as one attributes some value to the fetus—and they demonstrate how economists routinely make such outrageous calculations in insurance claims for loss of body parts—and put the value as low as one hundredth of a human being, the lowered crime rate would not come near justifying the number of abortions. Throughout the book, they repeatedly state that economists are not in the business of making moral judgments but of coldly assessing data and analyzing cause and effect. We could argue that the link between increased abortions and decreased crime is not one of cause and effect, and they would challenge us to come up with statistics to support our position, but if we were to grant the linkage while nevertheless disputing the morality of the trade-off we would not be in disagreement with them. This distinction is missed in most of the discussion of Levitt's findings.

Elizabeth Nicol
Urbana, Illinois

Conservative Calvin

Richard John Neuhaus' knee-jerk defense of all things "Bush" is becoming increasingly evident. Take for example his recent criticism of Calvin College ("While We're At It," August/September). Rather than praise the college for warmly inviting President Bush to give its commencement address, Neuhaus chose to chide the institution because one hundred teachers (less than 30 percent of the faculty) published a respectful letter disagreeing with the very reasonable view that the Iraq War policy is not de-facto "God's will."

Since conservatives comprise anywhere from 2 to 6 percent of faculty on the major campuses across the country, the fact that over 70 percent of the Calvin faculty chose *not* to sign the protest letter is stunning and should have been viewed as a positive.

But Neuhaus calls the faculty protest "smarminess" and goes on to denigrate the "national prominence" of Calvin College, as if it is some rude, liberal Podunk institution looking for cheap media attention with a publicity stunt. Like Neuhaus, I am a faithful Catholic and recognize the Iraq War as just.

But unlike Neuhaus, I also recognize that reasonable, thoughtful Christians can disagree with each other on this war. Calvin is consistently recognized as a stalwart Christian academic institution, one of a very few remaining in this country. Neuhaus' spin on Calvin's invitation shows how the Iraq issue is tainting his ability to interpret even praiseworthy events.

Anthony Newley
Bowling Green, Ohio

RJN replies:

On the contrary, I respect Calvin College, I admire Calvin College, I love Calvin College. It may be my favorite college, among those of a

Calvinist persuasion. But the letter by the faculty minority was smarmy, or at least disingenuous. As for my wondering whether the protest was organized to generate publicity for the college, that was—in full awareness of running the risks of subtlety—intended humorously. My respect for those who disagree with U.S. policy in Iraq was, I think, amply addressed in my reflection in the October issue, “Iraq and Moral Judgment.”

A Warrior for Education

It appears that FIRST THINGS (“While We’re At It” August/September) was given a partial, and hence misleading, account of the comments of Robert A. Wild, S.J., which declared that Marquette University “is first and foremost an academic institution.” President Wild’s statement was made in the context of a firestorm generated by the offer of a seven-figure gift if the university would revert to a nickname formerly used for its athletic teams. In the hysteria that followed this offer, some urged that the university take the money and run; others cried that the university was all about sports and that the former nickname was the essence of the university. You do not have to take my word for it. These things were not done in a corner; you can look them up.

Wild responded to the crisis generated by the aficionados of the former nickname by stating that the university was not for sale, by teaching about the true idea of a Catholic university as transcending athletics and nicknames, and by opening the door to a reconsideration of nicknames as long as the nickname did not violate Catholic teaching. The words you quoted were an excerpt of a much more significant teaching moment.

At the end of the day, the university ruled the former nickname out of bounds, and the university commu-

nity voted to retain the current nickname. And the students, faculty, and alumni continued to advance as a great Catholic university.

When the whole story that this incident and the context of the attendant remarks is fully known, FIRST THINGS should praise Marquette University for its courage and faithfulness, not heap the school with sarcasm.

Rolf Wegenke
Sun Prairie, Wisconsin

Here I Stand

I recall reading *The Catholic Moment* when it first appeared back in 1987, and due in part to my ongoing interest in conversion, I was immediately intrigued by Richard John Neuhaus’ metamorphosis from Lutheran minister to Roman Catholic priest. The process of human transformation, in terms of its many subtleties over time, and richly informed by generous theological reflection, gave me a deep appreciation for this very thoughtful account. I was, therefore, surprised to find that such subtlety and attention to nuance was not duplicated in Neuhaus’ review of *The Evangelical Moment* (“The Public Square,” August/September), a book that in a certain sense chronicles my own transition from Roman Catholicism to evangelical Protestantism. The door apparently does not swing both ways.

Though it is ostensibly about my own contribution to the field of American religion, the review nevertheless begins and ends with a paean to Timothy George, “a Baptist who is dean of Beeson Divinity School and who will also deliver our annual Erasmus Lecture in October.” It’s almost as if the reviewer, not liking the difficult task at hand, needs to remind us that there are, after all, “good” evangelicals who do not raise the admittedly difficult historiographical issues that are considered in

a forthright fashion in *The Evangelical Moment*. Emboldened by this move, Neuhaus likewise feels free to declare that “the great majority of Christians in the world belong to bodies that, in continuity with two millennia of history, believe women cannot be ordained to what is traditionally called the presbyterate,” as if the mere pronouncement of such a statement thereby settles the matter for any contemporary or future discussion.

Beyond the considerable body of research that has emerged in the past three decades which demonstrates that women played a far more generous role in the early Church than perhaps Neuhaus has imagined, my own Wesleyan holiness tradition has apparently escaped his ecumenical vision as well for it was already ordaining women in the nineteenth century.

I have never met Timothy George, but judging from the accolades offered by Neuhaus he must be a wonderful man and an exemplary Christian. He’s the dean of a well-established divinity school, a Baptist theologian and an earnest Christian, a gifted writer and a theologically articulate lecturer, a champion of orthodoxy, “distinguishing heresy from truth,” and one who has rightly discerned, as Neuhaus puts it, the “pattern of Christian truth, a pattern derived from the apostolic witness and maintained across time as the *depositum fidei*.”

And yet, though I am not acquainted with him, I know at least this much: No matter how saintly he is, no matter how profound his Christian witness, no matter how gifted his teaching, Timothy George will not be sharing in the Lord’s Supper with Richard John Neuhaus. That stubborn fact is one of the reasons *The Evangelical Moment* was written.

Kenneth J. Collins
Asbury Theological Seminary
Wilmore, Kentucky

Eucharist for Whom?

I was rather surprised to find myself quoted in the recent issue of *FIRST THINGS* as claiming, "Any church excluding Christians at a given place is not merely a bad church, but rather is not church at all, since a Eucharist to which not all the Christians at a given place might gather would not be merely a morally deficient Eucharist, but rather no Eucharist at all."

Now, it is true that these words are found in my book, *After Our Likeness*. But they do not represent my opinion, but rather that of the eminent Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas. His point has nothing to do with church discipline, and therefore with the possibility that some people at a given place who confess

"the lordship of Christ" might be excluded from partaking of the Eucharist.

Instead, he is making an ecclesiological point: At any given place, there should be only one Eucharist celebrated to which all Christians "in good standing" should be admitted. Put differently, his point is that Eucharist requires the catholic composition of the Eucharistic communion and must transcend all natural and social divisions at a specific place. That is not just a moral demand placed on the church; it is the criterion of ecclesiality. Which is exactly how the context in which the above quote is situated in my book demands that it be read.

I happen not to agree with Zizioulas on this point, but at least his point can be theologically defend-

ed. Opening communion indiscriminately to all who confess Christ irrespective of how they live and what they believe, cannot be defended.

Miroslav Volf
New Haven, Connecticut

RJN replies:

I appreciate Professor Volf's clarification. I was relying on Professor Collins' use of the quotation in his book *The Evangelical Moment*.

Correction: The report in the October issue that the most recent meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council "called for the United States to get out of Iraq" and agreed to "consider disinvestment from Israel" is incorrect. These steps were advocated at the meeting, but the council took no position on them.

Advent Windows

Holy Holle, Mother Winter,
Shakes her eider till it flutters,
Till the ticking frees its feathers,
Drifting, shifting into snowflakes,
Soft as swansdown, slowly falling,
Blanketing the world in whiteness.

Robed in furs of spotless whiteness,
Rapt, the Snow Queen watches winter.
Glacial ice, her mirror, falling,
Shatters into shards: each flutters
Through the air; her splintered snowflakes
Fly, all fletched with freezing feathers.

Fairies paint the panes with feathers,
Frost the frames with hoary whiteness,
Limn the pines and posts with snowflakes,
Weave the world the gown of Winter,
Fragile lace, its frills and flutters
Fixed, all frozen water falling.

Ghosts of past and present falling
In with future float like feathers
Round the miser; each one flutters

Trailing winding-sheets whose whiteness
Rivals that of Old Man Winter,
Swirling, thick as churchyard snowflakes.

Standing stark amidst the snowflakes,
Faint, the Little Matchgirl, falling,
Strikes a match to ward off winter,
Sees it blaze like phoenix feathers,
Green and gold and Hope's bright whiteness—
Like a dying moth, it flutters.

Mary rides; her heart still flutters,
Though she does not know of snowflakes
Save a star whose wondrous whiteness
Blazes forth to stop man's falling,
Heralds Hope like angel feathers
Left within her lap last winter.

Hope still flutters, icons falling,
Six-vaned snowflakes, Heaven's feathers,
Stars of whiteness lighting winter.

Kevin Andrew Murphy

OPINION

Orphans by Design

Eric Cohen

“Orphan” is one of those words that seems old-fashioned to modern ears—a word that evokes abject poverty in a Dickens novel. But in the years ahead, our reproductive technologies may lead us down a new, terrible path of creating orphans by design. In this case, the problem is not the tragic death of parents but the deliberate creation of children without living biological mothers or fathers—as if such bodily origins do not much matter, as if nurturing were the only dimension of parenthood that still has any meaning.

Over the past few years, a cadre of leading scientists has been working on “gamete harvesting” and “gamete engineering,” techniques that may be moving soon from the laboratory to the clinic. The first technique involves harvesting eggs from aborted fetuses and fertilizing them with sperm in the laboratory. The dead fetus, in other words, is the child’s biological mother. The second technique involves destroying human embryos, deriving embryonic stem cells, and turning those stem cells into sperm or eggs. The dead embryo, in other words, is the child’s biological mother or father. By these methods, we would produce children sprung from the dead, or children whose genetic parents were never allowed to be born, or children who resemble those who never had human faces.

Remarkably, it seems that even stem cells derived from male embryos can produce eggs, and in time stem cells from female embryos may be coaxed to produce sperm. In the age of embryo cloning, there is no reason the embryonic clone of a man cannot be used to provide eggs with a male genome or the embryonic clone of a woman used to produce sperm with a female genome. By this route, men and women are rapidly becoming interchangeable even when it comes to making babies. Armed with a growing mastery over modern biology, we make ourselves, in a sense, post-biological beings. We move beyond male and female.

Dr. Tal Biron-Shental, the lead researcher involved in harvesting eggs from aborted fetuses, offered this all-too-characteristic ethical reflection on her work: “I’m fully aware of the controversy about this—but probably, in some place, it will be ethically acceptable.” Apparently, this is all the justification she needs.

And to read the technical descriptions of this research—so cold, so clinical, so inhuman—is to understand how the scientist’s conscience atrophies. Take this abstract, from the June 2005 meeting of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology: “Because embryoid bodies sustain blood development, we reasoned that they might also support primordial germ cell formation. Although there is a lack of markers that can suitably distinguish between ES cells and PGCs, retinoic acid acts to rapidly differentiate ES cells while stimulating proliferation of PGCs.” In other words, it may be possible to destroy embryos and harvest usable eggs and sperm from their tiny cellular cadavers.

As with any technique of assisted reproduction, the public demand for this research is driven primarily by the terrible pain of infertility and the powerful desire to have a child of one’s own. Lineage is the motive, even if it is lineage that is ultimately betrayed. But why, we must ask, would anyone use these novel techniques in particular? And how are gamete harvesting and gamete engineering different from the modern-day sperm bank or egg market? From artificial insemination or *in-vitro* fertilization (IVF)?

Consider the technique of gamete harvesting. One reason to take eggs from aborted fetuses is that they are easier to get. The dead fetus can no longer be inconvenienced, and the egg-seekers need not trouble to request consent from the fetal “donor.” At present, individuals or couples who cannot produce eggs of their own need to find women who are willing to donate their extra eggs after undergoing fertility treatment or women who are willing to undergo super-ovulation and extraction simply to be egg-donors or egg-sellers.

Finding such women is not easy, since even those women undergoing IVF for themselves have powerful reasons not to donate their extra eggs: If having one’s own biologically related child is so important that women will undergo the ordeal of IVF, then giving away one’s eggs is an affront to the longing that led one to the fertility clinic in the first place. It means leaving one’s progeny in the hands of another. And while the procedure to harvest eggs is not high-risk, the intervention is also not trivial. As a result, the demand for donor eggs outstrips the supply. Using fetal eggs offers a way to bring supply and demand into balance.

For those infertile couples who are interested in keeping reproduction “within the marriage,” so to speak, using eggs from aborted fetuses might have an additional appeal, for there is no living female rival

with a claim to motherhood. The resulting child is the progeny of the husband plus "X": the husband plus the unknowable, the husband and the slain. It produces a child who is biologically motherless—a partial orphan—from the moment of conception.

One need not downplay the great humanity of adoption to wonder about the wisdom of creating children who need to be adopted by the very mothers who carry them to term. This is what artificial conception with donor gametes has always required. And now, carried to gamete harvesting, the dilemma grows even starker.

Even for the child conceived, say, in an anonymous romance, it is still possible to hunt backward to one's origins, to seek one's human beginning in time, to search for some link to those who came before. This is also true for the child of an anonymous sperm or egg donor: One's origins—biologically and genetically—are still the seed of a living or once-living person, with a face we might look upon in real life or in pictures, with a lineage and history of his or her own. The child can still seek out the person he resembles in the flesh, even if the search comes up empty or is stymied. But with the eggs of an aborted fetus, the hunt for one's origins leads the child back to a void—indeed, to a slain organism never allowed to flourish, never known in person, never mourned in death. It leads back to the machinations of the scientist, making life from scratch.

What about the technique of gamete engineering—the production of sperm or eggs using stem cells from dead embryos, including cloned embryos whose genomes we control? The only compelling reason to use this technology—rather than donor sperm or donor eggs taken from consenting adults—is to create sperm or eggs with the genes of a particular person who could not produce sperm or eggs otherwise: that is, sperm from an infertile man; eggs from an infertile woman; eggs from a fertile man; sperm from a fertile woman.

Driven by the desire to have a child of their own, yet faced with the husband's inability to produce sperm, a married couple might embrace this novel method: clone the husband, destroy the embryo that possesses his genome, harvest embryonic stem cells from that embryo, and turn the stem cells into sperm that bear the genetic imprint of the husband himself. Yet while the sperm carries his genetic information, it is not *his* sperm. And while such an act is driven by the parental longing for a biologically related child, it requires an act of destruction—taking the life of one's clone in order to create a child of one's own. Paternal passion leads to paternal betrayal. The hunger for life

leads to an act that denies life, treating embryos simply as objects of manufacture and the young clone simply as a reproductive tool.

Even more radically, this technique might appeal to gay couples seeking children who are, in a sense, the fruit of their union. A gay female couple, for example, could one day clone one partner, destroy the cloned embryo, harvest its stem cells, turn those stem cells into sperm, and use the sperm to fertilize the other female partner. The movement for gay marriage finds an ally in emerging reproductive technologies that might make a novel form of homosexual parenthood possible. The limitations imposed by our maleness or femaleness are transcended by this act of biotechnological liberation. The unity-in-distinctness of fatherhood and motherhood will be further lost in a culture that thinks more about fulfilling desires and getting results than about the deep human meaning of our desires and our actions.

Of course, gamete harvesting and gamete engineering will not only be used by those seeking children. These techniques will also open up new avenues of embryo research and destruction on a mass scale. At present, the greatest practical barrier to creating embryos solely for research purposes—whether by cloning or IVF—is the difficulty of procuring eggs. But if scientists can manufacture an inexhaustible source of human eggs, then the embryo-research industry will advance in leaps and bounds. And as the last remaining connection with a living human progenitor—a consenting egg donor—is lost, whatever moral gravity, restraint, or conscience that still exists among researchers will likely erode. We will produce embryos industrially, and in doing so we will further obscure the human character of what we do (and destroy) in the name of progress.

While the moral hazards of gamete engineering and embryo research are distinct—the first violates the dignity of human procreation itself, the second violates the dignity of nascent human life—these practices are bound together in the instrumental view of human origins that makes them both possible. Like many tragic tales, the choices and actions that decide our fate are understandable, compelling, almost irresistible. Because the desire for a child of one's own—flesh of one's flesh—is so fundamental to being human, the infertile rightly seek some remedy. And when God does not answer their cries, the infertile understandably look to technique instead.

But because human procreation—the springing forth of new life from the union of mother and father—rightly commands our reverence and respect,

we ought to resist these novel efforts to transcend this defining part of our nature. We ought to, but apparently we cannot. And so we are only a few steps away—gamete engineering today, artificial wombs tomorrow—from manufacturing children without parents from conception to birth.

In its 2004 report *Reproduction and Responsibility*, the President's Council on Bioethics called for legislation banning the use of eggs or sperm harvested from aborted fetuses or destroyed embryos. So far, Congress has done nothing, even as the research proceeds rapidly ahead. But more deeply, the council sought to recover our understanding of what human procreation really is and really means. As the report put it:

At the very center of the picture of human procreation is the newborn child emerging from his or her mother's womb. Even as the child arrives, it is a still-developing new life, derived from the union of "seeds" contributed by the two adults who were and are the child's mother and (biological) father and whose child the newborn baby now becomes. Newly visible to the world after nine months of hidden growth, the child arrives not as "anyone" but as a "someone," with a defined and distinctive (beginning) identity—human, familial, individual, male or female. Part of any child's identity as this child lies in its special relationship to two particular human "someones" from whom the child descends. All of the child's being and identity it owes to a continuous developmental process that began with union of egg and sperm and that continued through an unbroken sequence of embryonic and fetal stages enacted within the womb of the mother. Though father and mother are equal contributors of seed, the mother alone brings the child to birth: its developing life absolutely depends on the protection and silent nurturing of her body, its emerging life depends absolutely on her labor.

Only by recovering this understanding of the body, of motherhood and fatherhood—of children as gifts welcomed into the world rather than made by human hands—will we set the limits we now desperately need. And only by recognizing the central place of bodily origins in shaping human identity can we prevent yet another step toward dehumanization in the name of serving genuine human desires. The existence of orphans is a tragedy that adoptive parents can often redeem. The mass production of orphans is an abomination that would further corrupt our understanding of human dignity.

Eric Cohen is editor of the New Atlantis and a resident scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Scientific Orthodoxies

Michael Behe

Back in the 1970s, when my wife Celeste was in the seventh grade at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the Bronx, her teacher, a Holy Cross Brother, tried to start one science class with a bang. Brandishing a textbook picture of nearly identical-looking embryos of different kinds of vertebrates—fish, amphibians, pigs, humans, and more—he announced with a flourish, "Evolution is true. Get used to it."

He didn't get the reaction he wanted. Celeste tells me she and the other kids in the class shrugged. What's the big deal? My own experience was similar. I learned about the spectacular power of Darwinian evolution at St. Margaret Mary Alacoque grade school and Bishop McDevitt high school in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. We were told that God could make life in any way He saw fit, and if He wanted to use secondary causes like natural selection rather than some special action, well, who were we to tell Him otherwise? It arguably shows even more power, the lesson went, for God to create relatively simple matter and laws which in the fullness of time would give rise to living creatures, including men and women who could respond with a free will to His love. It sounded fine to me.

My wife's classmates, and mine, didn't know it, but our indifference to evolution was shaped by our religious upbringing. Catholics have always been rather blasé about evolution. In our living room we have a copy of the 1907 edition of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (which Celeste rescued from the shredder at a local library's discarded book sale)—complete with the imprimatur of John Cardinal Farley of New York, and published "under the auspices of the Knights of Columbus Catholic Truth Committee." The encyclopedia carries a scholarly twenty-thousand-word article on evolution written by two Jesuits, one of whom was a professor of biology.

"What is to be thought of the theory of evolution? Is it to be rejected as unfounded and inimical to Christianity, or is it to be accepted as an established theory altogether compatible with the principles of a Christian conception of the universe?" the encyclopedia article asks. And it answers, "We must carefully distinguish between the different meanings of the words *theory of evolution* in order to give a clear and correct answer to

this question.” Distinctions abound, but the gist of the article is that Christians should be thoughtful and follow the evidence where it leads, confident that the truth of nature does not contradict the truth of God. Reading the old *Encyclopedia* entry reminded me of G.K. Chesterton’s observations in *Orthodoxy* that “The Christian is quite free to believe that there is a considerable amount of settled order and inevitable development in the universe. But the materialist is not allowed to admit into his spotless machine the slightest speck of spiritualism or miracle.” Unlike materialists, Christians can serenely evaluate the physical evidence. If the universe unfolded completely through the regularities of God’s laws, fine. If it unfolded mostly by law but also by irregularities or special actions of some sort, that’s fine too.

Unfortunately, there’s a large obstacle in the path of Christians who want to exercise their freedom to follow the evidence wherever it leads. Christians may have more freedom than materialists in deciding on the best explanation for nature, but overwhelmingly it is materialists—or practical materialists—who tell Christians the story of nature. So information about the way the universe works almost invariably passes through a rigid materialistic filter before it reaches the general public.

Although the good brother at Mount Carmel undoubtedly thought he was giving his seventh-grade students the straight dope about the evidence for evolution, the picture of vertebrate embryos he flaunted was utterly bogus. As has been widely reported in the past few years, Ernst Haeckel, the nineteenth-century embryologist and Darwin booster who first drew the embryos, took extensive liberties with the representations, apparently to make them meet evolutionary expectations more closely. The drawings were widely featured in high-school biology textbooks for most of the twentieth century.

The false drawings had the full weight of the scientific magisterium behind them, explicitly endorsed by such luminaries as Nobel laureate James Watson and Bruce Alberts, a recent president of the elite National Academy of Sciences, 90 percent of whose self-selected members are avowed materialists. Watson, Alberts, or others of that company surely could have discovered the drawings’ doubtful provenance if they’d cared to. Yet there’s no reason to think the scientific elite was actively conspiring to mislead the public about evidence for evolution. Rather, the embryos drawn by Haeckel were what materialists expected Darwinian evolution to show.

Of course, the problem isn’t usually fake evidence being passed off as fact. But when the evidence

vouched for by experts is skewed or pre-filtered through an alien philosophy, in what sense is a Christian free to follow the evidence of nature? I was told in Catholic high school that it looked strongly as though God must have used natural law to begin life—because scientists were making substantial progress in understanding how simple chemicals could combine to make the molecules of life. What they had in mind was the work of the chemist Stanley Miller, who back in the 1950s sparked a mixture of gases and saw that some chemicals were made that also occur in life.

Looking back, I don’t recall what evidence was presented in our high-school textbook, other than a picture of Miller standing beside his distillation apparatus. But I wrote the conclusion in my notebook without a second thought. Today, when I’m in a much better position to render a judgment, this claim based on Miller’s evidence strikes me as ludicrously inadequate. Now it looks to me—from the *physical* evidence—that God did something rather unusual to bring about the first life. Yet with the formation I received in science classes in Catholic schools, it didn’t surprise me at the secular universities I later attended that the topic of how life started was not even a subject for discussion. Of course it was by simple physical laws of some sort—everybody knew that. The only question was by what route material processes produced life.

As a postdoctoral associate at the National Institutes of Health in the early 1980s, I shared a lab with a woman named Joanne, a fellow postdoc and a serious Catholic. One slow afternoon she and I were gabbing about the Big Questions, including the origin of life. “What would be needed to get the first cell?” she asked. “You’d need a membrane for sure,” I said. “And metabolism.” “Can’t do without a genetic code,” she added, “and proteins.” We stopped, stared at each other, and both shouted, “Naaaaaahh!” Then we laughed and got back to work. Even though we quickly realized that there were brick walls everywhere one looked, our only reaction was to chuckle. What we didn’t do was to question seriously whether the unfolding of physical laws could adequately explain the very start of life. I guess we vaguely thought that even if we didn’t know, somebody else must. Or, even if no one knew, somebody would figure it out soon. Or eventually. There we were, two young, well-educated Catholic scientists, as free as the wind to come to our own conclusions, and we punted.

I hate to imagine what Chesterton would say about such fine specimens of free Christian thinking as Joanne and me. Yet a practical problem arises from a Christian’s freedom to find “a considerable amount of settled order and inevitable development” in nature: In a scientific culture dominated by materialism, social

pressure will push Christians to concede whatever is possible to concede as “inevitable.” At first, the concession might simply be irenic, to avoid conflict with materialists in areas that are cloudy and are thought to be unimportant. But as science progresses and claims more questions as legitimate fields of inquiry, the habit of not making waves can become dangerous, as the precedent of conceding the interpretation of material reality to materialists becomes firmly established. In the end, the ability of a Christian to see the hand of God in nature—not in some gauzy, emotional sense, but as a deduction from the physical data—is finally considered illegitimate. One day it was just the evolution of species that was unapproachable. The next day, the origin of life and the universe. Today even the origin of the mind falls under the materialist program.

Worse, Christian schools that pass on the latest materialistic thinking in science without clear warnings risk quashing the freedom of their students. It was in Catholic schools that Joanne and I had both been taught the scientifically correct attitude that the National Academy of Sciences later described in its 1999 booklet *Science and Creationism*. Although admitting the problem of the origin of life was “seemingly intractable” (in other words, no one has a clue), the academy chirpily kept the discussion firmly within a materialistic framework: “For those who are studying the origin of life, the question is no longer whether life could have originated by chemical processes involving nonbiological components. The question instead has become which of many pathways might have been followed to produce the first cells.” In other words, it doesn’t matter what the evidence is—the only conceivable conclusion is a materialistic one. Christians who unconsciously acquiesce in this line of thought have lost a significant chunk of their freedom.

As it happens, materialist scientists themselves are often as clueless as I was about the narrowness of their vision of reality. In a recent book titled *Lessons From the Living Cell*, a California biologist named Stephen Rothman demonstrates, both intentionally and unintentionally, the consequences of an impoverished metaphysics on even brilliant minds. He claims that for decades scientists laboring in Rothman’s own abstruse field of cellular protein transport ignored data that didn’t square with a favored hypothesis called vesicle theory. “Whether they thought the evidence convincing or weak, or were ignorant of it, many biologists soon came to believe that the vesicle model was not a model at all, but a description of an actual mechanism,” Rothman notes.

The scientific literature reflected this sense of understanding. Papers commonly talked about the model, either in general or regarding particular aspects

of it, as known and secure events of nature. Textbooks followed suit by communicating this comprehension to students. Such descriptions did not highlight, or commonly even mention, the immense lacunae of ignorance, the unanswered questions about the model’s fidelity to nature. Instead they gave the impression that it was all known, or at least almost all known, a certified product of laboratory research. . . . When evidence was reported that did not seem to fit the theory, it, not the theory, became suspect.

As with any other group, when a bevy of scientists gets a bee in its collective bonnet, the buzz can be hard to silence. And, as Rothman writes, the factors that decide which theories will be taken for granted can be decidedly non-rational: “Prejudice about ideas and people; personality; the power of authority and prior belief; raw political power; who controlled journals, organizations, and funds; the depth of commitment to an idea; and any and every other human and social attribute and foible that one can imagine are also at play.”

As a longtime skeptic of Darwinian evolution, I was buoyed by Rothman’s analysis. This guy gets it. He knows the difference between a theory and evidence, knows that in science popularity doesn’t determine truth. Surely he’d also understand that if scientists can be influenced by non-rational factors in a recondite area such as cellular protein transport, they can be even more strongly influenced on deeply controversial topics such as evolution.

But then, on page 78, I was brought up short. As an antidote for the “strong microreductionism” that he disdains (defined as the view that “we can come to understand all phenomena completely from knowledge of their underlying structures, their constituent parts”), Rothman prescribes not open-mindedness but orthodox Darwinism! In a long, charming dialogue between two archetypal characters, Rothman’s alter ego Eudoxus lectures the reductionist Epistemon:

What is missing, what you have ignored or forgotten, is nothing less than the fundamental driving force of evolution—natural selection. It was by means of natural selection that the molecules you talk of became the material embodiment of the life forms that populate this planet. It was natural selection that connected them to life; that took their steel and cement and constructed life’s edifice. And it is here that strong microreductionism ultimately fails. It is in natural selection that we see that the parts do not entail the whole.

"Took their steel and cement"? Why did we switch to the language of heroic mythology? Here is a fellow who has spent scores of pages scolding co-workers for reaching conclusions based on inadequate or imagined evidence, and now he suddenly begins to lead the parade. For his grand claim that natural selection explains all of evolution—and therefore all of life—Rothman fails to present the rigorous evidence he demands of the those simply trying to explain the workings of protein transport. In fact, he presents no evidence. With a shrug of their archetypal shoulders, Epistemon and Eudoxus simply agree to agree that unknown material processes must have started life and that natural selection must explain everything thereafter. Darwinism is not judged the winner among competing explanations—it's the only conceivable answer.

In my experience most scientists are not even as aware as Rothman of how underlying philosophical assumptions shape their conclusions and limit their choices: Materialism is the water they swim in, the tenet whose falsity is literally unimaginable.

Yet there are some who are aware of the role materialism plays, and they actively embrace it. Several years ago, marking the death of astronomer Carl Sagan, the distinguished biologist Richard Lewontin wrote in the *New York Review of Books*: "Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science *in spite of* the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, . . . *in spite of* the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism."

Meanwhile, in the introduction to his 1996 book *Vital Dust*, the Belgian Nobelist Christian de Duve forthrightly declared, "A warning: All through this book, I have tried to conform to the overriding rule that life be treated as a natural process, its origin, evolution, and manifestations, up to and including the human species, as governed by the same laws as non-living processes." And even while acknowledging that Darwinian evolution has no answers, the biochemist Franklin Harold in his 2001 *The Way of the Cell* peremptorily bans the idea that intelligence is necessary to explain some aspects of life: "We should reject, as a matter of principle, the substitution of intelligent design for the dialogue of chance and necessity; but we must concede that there are presently no detailed Darwinian accounts of the evolution of any biochemical system, only a variety of wishful speculations."

Even more chilling are passages such as this: "The greatest scientific advance of the last 1,000 years was

providing the evidence to prove that human beings are independent agents whose lives on earth are neither conferred nor controlled by celestial forces. Although it may be more conventional to measure scientific progress in terms of specific technological developments, nothing was more important than providing the means to release men and women from the hegemony of the supernatural." This isn't from a book or magazine article, or even from an editorial in a science journal. It's the beginning of a review article in the journal *Cell*, concerning the regulation of molecules entering and exiting various compartments of the cell—a technical review of a technical topic in a technical journal. The fact that the "hegemony of the supernatural" is offhandedly denounced reflects not only on the authors, but on the mindset of the scientific community that would find it unremarkable.

Let me pull together a few threads to bring the dilemma into clear focus. In the 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II points out: "It is not too much to claim that the development of a good part of modern philosophy has seen it move further and further away from Christian Revelation, to the point of setting itself quite explicitly in opposition." A major tenet of the explicitly antagonistic philosophy, he observes, is scientism, which "relegates religious, theological, ethical and aesthetic knowledge to the realm of mere fantasy." A big problem is that "the undeniable triumphs of scientific research and contemporary technology have helped to propagate a scientistic outlook, which now seems boundless, given its inroads into different cultures and the radical changes it has brought." And here is the rub: "There are in the life of a human being many more truths which are simply believed than truths which are acquired by way of personal verification. Who, for instance, could assess critically the countless scientific findings upon which modern life is based?"

Who indeed? Everyone, including scientists, relies on others for the overwhelming majority of information they accept about the way nature works. For just this reason, I had been surprised to find out Haeckel's embryo drawings were false, surprised to discover what I was taught in high school about the origin of life and evolution didn't square with the scientific literature I later read. Yet if for "truths which are simply believed" about the natural world Christians must rely on those with a "scientistic outlook"—who regard religious knowledge as "mere fantasy," who are "quite explicitly in opposition" to Christian Revelation, who "have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism," who will vouch for "patent absurdity," and who want "to release men and women from the hegemony of the supernatural"—well, then, Christians are in a lot of trouble.

In 1998 Larson and Witham published a survey in the journal *Nature* of members of the National Academy of Sciences; it showed that, overall, 90 percent of the members were materialists (and therefore atheists), with the number rising to 95 percent for biologists. Although the figures are lower (around 60 percent) for “ordinary” scientists, and lower still for other scientifically knowledgeable groups such as physicians and engineers, the tone is set at the top. Might the academy members’ materialistic views color the data? Might the academy recommend that science be taught in ways that restrict a Christian student’s intellectual freedom?

Of course, people are allowed to be materialists if they choose. Thoughtful persons such as, say, Richard Lewontin, who consciously choose materialism over theism, are well within their rights. They are also within their rights to argue strongly for the correctness of their views. But the problem is not such explicit and deliberate materialism. The problem is rather socially contagious materialism, spread more by social pressure than by rational argument. The social pressure doesn’t have to be overt; it doesn’t have to involve ridicule or arm-twisting. It is often just an intellectual climate in which most people do not recognize that their theoretical options have been artificially limited.

Socially acquired materialism often manifests itself by an emotional reaction when challenged. When I lecture in favor of the idea that intelligence is explicitly needed to explain some aspects of biology, the response is not typically, “Gee, that’s interesting, but I disagree.” Instead, people become angry, denouncing the mildest of challenges to materialism as unspeakable heresy. Once after a lecture in Virginia a student declared she was going to dedicate her life to demonstrating I was wrong. In Canada an academic ran after me with a loaded rat trap, inviting me to stick my finger in it to see if it worked (I use a mousetrap as an example of the sort of system that can’t be made by Darwinian processes). After a lecture to the biochemistry department of a major west-coast university, a group of students I spoke with sullenly agreed that the evidence for Darwinism wasn’t there. Nevertheless, they viewed the alternative with contempt and passionately swore to seek a materialistic answer. At a debate before the Royal Society of Medicine in London, I argued for the incontestable position that science doesn’t yet objectively know whether Darwinian processes can explain the human mind, simply because philosophers and neurobiologists don’t yet even know what constitutes the human mind. After all, I said, one can’t contend that science knows how an undefined entity could be produced by an unspecified process. By a show of hands, about 95 percent of the assembled scientists disagreed.

Of course science already “knows” natural selection can explain the human mind—because science already “knows” Darwinian processes explain everything.

With such a uniformity of prejudice in the scientific community, how can we ensure that children consciously realize from an early age the extent of their freedom to interpret nature? Should Christian scientists simply point out for Christian students and non-scientists where the data end and materialistic presumptions begin?

Unfortunately, Christian scientists suffer from the same baleful influences as everyone else, including the influence of materialistic presuppositions. As a young man I was happy as a clam with my theistic-Darwinian view of nature. As a Christian I was free to assume a “considerable amount of settled order.” In my mushy mind, this meant accepting claims that were based on materialism and scorning the benighted Christians who didn’t accept them. Even now, I am sometimes singled out by Darwinists as the most “reasonable” Intelligent Design proponent, because I’ve written that I think common descent is true. I’m embarrassed to admit that I derive some odd, involuntary pleasure from being thought the “best” of the lot. My reaction is especially irrational because some of my Intelligent Design colleagues who disagree with me on common descent have greater familiarity with the relevant science than I do.

We all desire to be admired as much, and scorned as little, as possible. So unless we have a stronger reason to anchor us, we tend to drift away from the contempt and toward the applause. In a profession dominated by materialism, social pressure pushes one to accept as many materialistic premises as one can. Since Christian intellectual freedom is compatible with near-complete agreement, that’s the boundary toward which one floats, whether it is true or not. Other things being equal, a Christian scientist is no more reliable than anyone else at drawing lines between evidence and speculation.

I think it is much more important for a Christian to be fully aware of his intellectual freedom than to be correct on any particular scientific matter. But in order to preserve that freedom, Christian students must be explicitly instructed in it. One way to make the topic more realistic to students might be to have them read excerpts of works by folks such as Richard Lewontin, Richard Dawkins, and other scientists who have consciously chosen materialism over against theism. Students should be told about polls showing that most top scientists are materialists. Most effective, I think, would be to teach them past examples, such as Haeckel’s embryo drawings, where materialistic presuppositions drove the acceptance of a false or questionable theory.

If more Christian students were so instructed, and if their mature thoughts eventually leavened the scientific community, maybe some future Holy Cross brother in the Bronx could hold up a drawing of a human embryo and announce to his science class with a flourish, "You're fearfully and wonderfully made. Get used to it."

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Jewish Babies

*Ben J. Wattenberg
and Jeremy Kadden*

New Square is a small village in Rockland County, New York, less than an hour's drive from Manhattan. With fewer than five thousand residents, it would not be of particular interest to the average passerby. But New Square is unique: much like the old shtetls of Eastern Europe, it is entirely Jewish, and entirely Ultra-Orthodox, or Haredi. These are among the most zealous Jews in the world, the men donning black garb, black hats, long beards and sidelocks, and the women wearing long skirts, long sleeves, and wigs.

Besides dress, there are many things that set this small, tight-knit community apart from the surrounding world—their professions, their food, even their language—but perhaps their most distinctive characteristic is their demography. While most Jews in America have few children, the Jews of New Square have many: at least six children per woman, and possibly even more, a rate among the highest on earth.

This is not unique to New Square. It is found wherever there are Haredi Jews, all over the world, and there is evidence to suggest the trend is unprecedented in Jewish history. Until the 1950s, official demographic information about Jewish birthrates was difficult to come by. Yet it appears that in the immediate aftermath of World War II, American Haredim were probably having in the range of two to four children per woman, much like their non-Haredi counterparts. But most demographers believe that in the 1970s the situation began to change dramatically. Since then, the Jewish community has broken into two distinct groups.

On the one hand are groups like the Haredim, whose birth rates have climbed to extremely high

rates. At their current pace, the Haredi population could theoretically double or even triple in each generation.

On the other hand are the non-Haredi Jews, where the opposite seems to have occurred. Their fertility has fallen steadily to very low levels, with estimates ranging from 1.4 to 1.9 children per woman. Despite surveys that show their desire to have more children, American Jewish women in their thirties are nearly twice as likely to be childless as their non-Jewish counterparts. This part of the Jewish community is also considerably older than the surrounding population: The average Jewish age is forty-two, compared with just thirty-five for the United States as a whole.

Not a single major Jewish organization is working directly to reverse these trends. Meanwhile, intermarriage—a problem that has received enormous attention over the last few years—is having a substantial impact on the non-Haredi part of the community. Though the rate of increase has slowed somewhat, the intermarriage rate is just above 50 percent, according to the National Jewish Population Survey of 2000-2001. That is, one out of every two marrying Jews is marrying a non-Jew. And only one-third of intermarried couples raise their children as Jews. Taken together, these two trends—low fertility and intermarriage—may seriously weaken America's non-Haredi and secular Jewish communities in the not-too-distant future.

Various estimates have placed the Haredi population in America at approximately 250,000, about 5 percent of the total Jewish population. (Statistics about the Haredi population are scarce not only because of logistical difficulties in counting them, but also because of a Haredi taboo on counting people at all.) "A culture of children has developed in Haredi society," says Samuel Heilman, professor of sociology at Queens College in the City University of New York. "In secular societies, young people aim to get a college degree, go out into the working world, and succeed in their careers. Haredim, on the other hand, have made it their goal to have as many children as possible. That is how they realize success." Children have become a sort of Haredi "one-upsmanship" that sets their society apart from secular society: The more children a couple has, the more forcefully they feel that they have demonstrated their superiority over the secular world, and that they have followed the biblical injunction to be fruitful and multiply. Added is a post-Holocaust mentality: The Haredim believe they are called to repopulate the Jewish community. (The number of Jews in the world is estimated to be two million less today, at thirteen million, than it was in 1933, fifteen million.)

Despite their high fertility rates, though, no one has a sense of just how many Haredi offspring are staying

within their communities. Periodically, stories trickle out about people who grew up Haredi and moved out of the community after learning about the nature of the non-Haredi world. A few films and support groups testify to this trend, but no one really has a clear sense of how many people are involved in this drift. Malkie Schwartz, who heads a support group for former Haredim called "Footsteps," believes that the trend will only grow. "A lot of these kids have access to the Internet," she says, "and that makes it easier to leave." On top of that, she says, the largely Haredi neighborhood of Williamsburg has now become one of the "hip" places for young non-religious (and even anti-religious) artists seeking relatively inexpensive rent near Manhattan. This shift, Schwartz says, might lead more people to leave the Haredi community as they come into greater contact with young, non-Haredi Jews.

But evidence is scarce as to just how many "expatriates" are out there. Indeed, even in those prominent stories of departure from the community, there is strong evidence that the majority stay within. One scholar emphasizes that the numbers going out are tiny, especially compared to the numbers being born. On balance, then, there is enormous growth for the Haredi community as a whole.

What about the non-Haredi world? In order for a population to remain constant over the course of generations, women must bear, on average, 2.1 children. Estimates of American Jewish fertility vary from 1.4 to 1.9 children (this latter number, still low, includes Haredi births.) In fact, signs of non-Haredi depopulation are already beginning to show. The 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey showed a total American Jewish population that declined in size since 1990, from 5.5 million in 1990 to 5.2 million in 2000. At the same time the total U.S. population increased over that period by more than 30 million people.

Many demographers have stressed the changed role of women as a general demographic correlative of plunging global fertility. Non-Haredi Jewish women are likely to have found the workplace more stimulating than child-rearing. Non-Haredi Jewish women are also more likely to be highly educated than the total population, choosing not to give up the upscale employment that high education offers. Further, compared to the total population, non-Haredi Jewish women are more likely to use birth control, their age at first marriage is higher, and they are much more likely to support legal abortion (in 1996, for example, 74 percent of Jews supported legalized abortion, as opposed to 48 percent of Protestants and 46 percent of Catholics). Each of these factors correlates statistically with lower fertility.

Other general "liberation" factors have played a role among Jews and non-Jews alike: high levels of both divorce and cohabitation, for instance, which are both correlated with low fertility rates. Moreover, Jews are more likely to reside in urban rather than rural settings—another correlated factor. Whatever the reasons, one fact remains clear: The non-Haredi rates have fallen to low levels—in our estimation, 1.4 children per woman, perhaps even a little lower.

In the late 1990s, Antony Gordon and Richard Horowitz, two private researchers, collaborated on a study that showed the next few generations of Reform Jews dwindling down to a relative handful, while the numbers of Haredim would boom. Yet there is a major caveat, Samuel Heilman notes. "The Haredim have financial problems galore," he observes. The money is simply not there to finance families of eight, ten, or twelve children. Even some older Haredim, born before the recent demographic boom, are concerned about their grandchildren's financial security. "They are horrified by the number of kids their children are having," says Hella Winston, who has spent several years at the City University of New York studying dissent within the Haredi community.

Still, Rabbi Avi Shafran, director of public affairs for Agudath Israel of America, the largest organization of Haredi Jews in the United States, sees the future differently: "There will be an economic crunch, and there already are many two-income families in the community, but no Haredi Jew is starving, or having fewer children because of economic restraints. . . . All members of the community tithe their incomes to make sure that others will have the help they need. The Haredi community therefore has an unbelievable array of charitable organizations that ensure the survival of its members." According to Shafran, the Haredi community will grow stronger, younger, and much larger in the coming years.

Some Jews do not consider birthrate to be a grave problem. It's the quality, not the quantity, that should concern us, some say. In their view, a dedicated minority is far better for the long-term health of the Jewish people than a large group of people who are indifferent to their people's survival. "Less is more," they say. Unfortunately, though, less is really less. Fewer people means less funding for schools, nursing homes, synagogues, and community centers. Fewer people means fewer educators, organizers, and rabbis. It could also lead to decreased power in Washington and decreased support for Israel.

What then is to be done? Some have suggested subsidies, particularly in the form of lower Jewish

day-school tuition. However, many scholars disagree, arguing that tuition breaks and other subsidies would do little to encourage higher birthrates. With an ideology of reproduction, subsidies and tuition breaks would help. But among the vast majority of Jews there is no such ideology.

Indeed, the data from Europe and America about “paying people to have more children” through government subsidies and tax breaks are not encouraging. The Europeans have offered all kinds of tax breaks, child allowances, and government programs aimed at encouraging more children. And yet, despite all this, the average European fertility rate is 1.4, an all-time low, with no sign of reversal. Steven Bayme, the director of the department of “Contemporary Jewish Life” at the American Jewish Committee, reports that in the mid-1980s, a broad coalition of Jewish organizations came together to discuss Jewish birthrates. They all favored higher fertility, but there was a problem: How could it be encouraged? After much debate and discussion, the group decided that the best way to attack the problem was through the pulpit. They recommended that rabbis speak to their congregations about the need for more children, setting a tone among the congregations that would hopefully be just as effective as tuition breaks or day care.

But even that bargain-rate recommendation faced stiff opposition, says Bayme. One group was highly skeptical that rabbis could have any influence on the birthrate. Gerson Cohen, who was then the chancellor of the Conservative movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary, objected, telling the *Wall Street Journal* that “babies aren’t generated by sermons.” Others argue that focusing on young, career-oriented Jews is like treating the symptoms rather than the cause. Responsibility lies not with the young people but with the parents and community who reared them on values that first stressed occupational achievement, rather than raising a family. “It’s a mixed message,” says one twenty-something woman, “when parents begin telling their adult children to have kids when they’re just half-way towards achieving the very same educational goals their parents set out for them.” And, she notes, once they’ve had children, they are constantly pressured to send their children to the most expensive (and therefore best) schools and universities, which typically makes it extremely difficult to raise more than two children.

Blu Greenberg, founding president of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, is the mother of five herself and believes that women will always feel the need to raise children. “Women still want to nurture,” she

says, and “there’s still a lot more we can be doing to help women raise families” in a way that also allows them to have careers. Businesses and society, she feels, could do more to endorse alternative career tracks among women who choose to have children first and wait on their careers until later. Finally, though, Greenberg agrees that the Haredim are privy to a sacred truth. A traditional family, with traditional Sabbath meals around a table, is the best way to encourage higher birthrates: “traditionalism reinforces family,” she says. “Judaism is a family-oriented religion, where the rituals center on the home.”

Michael Steinhardt, one of Wall Street’s great investors and philanthropists, sides with Greenberg. “It doesn’t take a profound genius to see that there’s a relationship between tradition and childrearing. More traditional Jews have more babies.” He thinks, then, that the focus needs to be on education, starting from a very young age. To that end, his organization is opening twelve model pre-schools in September 2005, with the aim of raising the number of Jewish children who go on to day schools.

Steinhardt has data on his side. Full-time Jewish education has proven powerful in reducing intermarriage and assimilation rates and in providing students with a deeper sense of Judaism. Perhaps, then, it can also reverse the demographic decline. The numbers also give hope. The 2000-2001 estimates that 29 percent of Jewish children are enrolled in full-time Jewish education. This is more than a four-fold increase from two generations ago: Among their grandparents, just 7 percent had a Jewish day school education.

But despite the gains in education, not a single major Jewish organization focuses directly on the problem of Jewish fertility. And very soon, the Jewish birth dearth will begin to inform the way we think about almost all things Jewish—from politics and education to seniors, synagogues, child care, and employment. If non-Haredi Judaism is going to stop its downward slide, the Jewish community must begin to face this problem, and at least begin to ask the difficult questions. In the words of one Jewish scholar, “just asking the questions could provide some momentum.”

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Our American Babylon

Richard John Neuhaus

Once upon a time—it was the 1976 bicentennial of the American founding, to be precise—I wrote a book on the American experiment and the idea of covenant. *Time* magazine picked up on it and reported, “On the day of judgment, Neuhaus wants to meet God as an American.”

That’s not quite right. What I wrote is that I *expect* to meet God as an American. And that for the simple reason that, among all the things I am or have been or hope to be, I am undeniably an American. It is not the most important thing, but it is an inescapable thing. Nor, even were I so inclined, should I try to escape it. It is a pervasive and indelible part of what is called one’s “identity.” Among American thinkers, and not least among American theologians, one frequently discerns an attempt to escape one’s time and place. It is a very American thing to try to do. We are never more American than when we believe we have transcended being American. America is, after all, as some like to say, the world’s first “universal nation.”

The theologian Robert Jenson has employed to fine effect the phrase “the story of the world.” The story of Israel and the Church, he writes, is nothing less than the story of the world, and the world is today lost in its confusions because it has “lost its story.” I would add that, for those of us who are Americans, we are *as Americans* part of the story that is the story of the world. Moreover, America itself—this nation that the founders called an experiment and, like any experiment, may succeed or fail—is part of the story that is the story of the world. Of the many ways of thinking about America—economic, political, cultural, etc.—there is today a striking scarcity of thinking about America theologically.

It was not always so. Not so long ago, American intellectuals, including American theologians, spent

considerable time thinking about their place as Americans. But in the last half century or so, we have largely lost our story and our place in the story of the world. Theologians, too, have succumbed to the false-consciousness of having transcended the American experience, which is expressed, more often than not, in a typically American anti-Americanism that is relished and imitated by others, notably by European intellectuals. As in the writing of biography, or of history more generally, one cannot think truly about a story with which one is not sympathetically engaged. Love is sometimes blind, but contempt is always blind.

Perhaps we should from the start attend to one common misunderstanding. To think about the American experiment theologically, or to suggest that God is not indifferent to the American experiment, in no way implies that people who are Americans are “special” in the sense of occupying a superior place in God’s concerns and purposes. The Christian tradition gives us to understand that a beggar on the streets of Calcutta is in the view of God, *sub specie aeternitatis*, as important as the president of the United States. As for the proud pretensions of worldly powers, Psalm 2 tells us that God holds them in derision, laughing them to scorn. And yet, it is precisely God’s concern for everyone, including the littlest and the least, that warrants our belief that He takes an interest in realities that affect billions of people on earth. America and its role in the world is such a reality.

To the God who marks every sparrow that falls, *everything* matters. God is infinite and his capacity for concern is inexhaustible. To propose that He cares more about one people than another is both unseemly and theologically incoherent. To God and to its five million citizens, the Kingdom of Denmark “matters” as much as the United States of America. But the Kingdom of Denmark is not, insofar as we can measure consequence, as consequential for human history as is, for better and for worse, the United States. Our subject is the stories within the story of the world,

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which is to say human history, which is to say the events and forces that influence and engage people who are the object of God's infinite concern. Any suggestion that one nation is more "special" to God than another is excluded. The people of Israel and the Church joined to Israel are His elect people, but God is no respecter of nations. At the same time, neither is He indifferent to, among other things beyond numbering, the political configurations that may hinder or serve His purposes. It is by no means the decisive thing, but neither is it a trifling thing, that we Christians in America are *American* Christians. We have a measure of responsibility for this country and its influence in the world. As do Danes for Denmark, Japanese for Japan, Kenyans for Kenya, and on and on. Because America impinges upon them all, they, too, have more than a passing interest in how the American story within the story of the world is told.

Thought that is real and not merely, as Cardinal John Henry Newman put it, "notional," is thought that is sympathetically *situated* in time and place. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that Christians have here no abiding city. In the third eucharistic prayer of the Mass we pray, "Strengthen in faith and love your pilgrim Church on earth." We Christians are a pilgrim people, a people on the way, exiles from our true home, aliens in a strange land. There is in all the Christian tradition no more compelling depiction of our circumstance than St. Augustine's *City of God*. Short of the final coming of the Kingdom, the City of God and the earthly city are intermingled. We are to make use of, pray for, and do our share for the earthly city. Here Augustine cites the words of Jeremiah urging the people not to fear exile in Babylon: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its peace you will find your peace."

It is often forgotten how very much of a Roman Augustine was. The *City of God* is, among other things, a sustained argument with pagan interlocutors whom we might today call "public intellectuals," in which Augustine is contending for the superiority of the Christian philosophy and understanding of history. It is sometimes suggested that Augustine knew he was writing in the ruins of a collapsing empire that he dismissed as terminally corrupt. In fact, he wrote, "The Roman Empire has been shaken rather than transformed, and that happened to it at other periods, before the preaching of Christ's name, and it recovered. There is no need to despair of its recovery at this present time. Who knows what is God's will in this matter?" Knowing that we do not know God's will does not mean that we do not think about God's will in this and all matters,

for, as Augustine writes in the same text, "It is beyond anything incredible that God should have willed the kingdoms of men, their dominations and their servitudes, to be outside the range of the laws of His providence."

The Christian disposition toward exile in Babylon, wherever that Babylon may be, is nicely caught in the second-century *Letter to Diognetus*, in which it said of the Christians that "though they are residents at home in their own countries, their behavior there is more like that of transients; they take their full part as citizens, but they also submit to anything and everything as if they were aliens. For them, every foreign country is a homeland, and every homeland a foreign country."

Taking their full part as citizens in the foreign country and homeland that is our American Babylon, Christians have, at least until fairly recently, tried to understand the part of the American experiment within what Augustine calls the laws of God's providence. In this they followed the precedent of the Great Tradition of Christian thought in other times and places.

As Oliver O'Donovan reminds us in *Desire of the Nations* and his more recent *The Ways of Judgment*, "Constantinianism," far from being a term of opprobrium, represents a considerable Christian achievement of that place and time. The distinguished historian Robert Louis Wilken convincingly argues that the toleration and later establishment of the Church was not a corruption in which, as it is sometimes said today, the Church ended up "doing ethics for Caesar." When, in A.D. 390, St. Ambrose excommunicated the Christian Theodosius for his massacre in Thessalonika, he was holding Caesar accountable to the ethics of the Church. Similarly, what is often dismissively referred to as medieval "Christendom" can be seen as a creative coordination, for its time and place, of the tensions between, and the mutual interests of, the earthly city and the City of God.

In the light of this long and complex tradition, we can view the distinctive ways in which American Christians have tried to understand the American story—the ways in which (if one is permitted that barbarous phrase) they "did theology" about America. The first Puritan settlers understood themselves to be, in Perry Miller's happy phrase, on an errand into the wilderness. The image was that of God's chosen people on the way to the promised land, and they were the New Israel. Sometimes they and the New World *were* Jerusalem, having escaped the captivity of the Babylon of the Old World and, most particularly, having escaped the Babylon of Catholicism and of the insufficiently Protestantized Church of England.

With these Puritan beginnings, American thinking about America radically reversed the image of exile.

The Church of the *Letter to Diognetus* and of Augustine became Babylon, and the foreign country unqualifiedly the Christian homeland. In the Puritan imagination, America became Jerusalem, and even, in the more utopian flights of theological imagination, the New Jerusalem.

After his visit to this country, G.K. Chesterton famously remarked that "America is a nation with the soul of a church." The remark is both famous and true. America, he said, is about "making a home for vagabonds and a nation out of exiles." It is a "home for the homeless." It is a temporary home, to be sure, but a happy refuge for pilgrims along the way. Every human being, said Chesterton, can become an American by accepting a political creed. And the great thing about that political creed is that it leaves one free to accept a higher creed and pledge a higher allegiance to a country where we will, at last, be homeless no more.

In the absence of an ecclesiology that tethered them to the Church through time, for many American Protestant thinkers the nation with the soul of a church became their Church. That was true then, and it is true now. More than three hundred years later, in yet another reversal, some theologians today depict America itself as Babylon. But, like their Protestant forebears, they, too, have no Church in continuity with the Christian story through time. It is not enough to have the soul of a church. American Protestants have a tendency to forget that, in the biblical image, the Church is not the *soul* of Christ but the *body* of Christ. With this in mind, we can better understand Harold Bloom's argument that "the American religion" is gnosticism. Religious gnosticism goes hand in hand with ecclesiological docetism. The result is less the Christian story than the free-floating and ambiguously Christian experience untethered from an ecclesiology that, as Newman would say, is not notional but real.

But I get ahead of myself. After the Puritan errand into the wilderness came the national founding. With very few exceptions, it was presided over by men who understood themselves to be serious Christians. Even Jefferson—whom ideological secularists depict as the chief, if not the only, founder—was much more of a Christian than is generally allowed. (See, for instance, Michael Novak's *On Two Wings*, or James Hutson's *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic*.)

In order to advance a principle of freedom, and in order not to threaten the religious establishments of the several states, the founders did a historically unprecedented thing. In the first provision of the First Amendment, they declared that the national government abdicated control of religious belief and practice. It would take almost two hundred years—the Supreme Court's *Everson* decision of 1947 is the usual reference here—

for religious freedom to be radically recast as the government's "neutrality" between religion and irreligion, much to the benefit of irreligion. The consequence is what has been described as the naked public square. By that phrase is meant the enforced privatization of religion and religiously informed morality, resulting in the exclusion of both from the government of "We the People" who stubbornly persist in being a vigorously, if confusedly, religious people.

In rebelling against what claimed to be legitimate authority of the British crown, the founders appealed to the laws of nature and of nature's God, making the argument that they were acting upon self-evident truths about inalienable rights with which we are endowed by the Creator. The inspiration of the errand into the wilderness resonates in The Great Seal of the United States of America printed on the back of every dollar bill, declaring this America to be a *novus ordo seclorum*—a new order for the ages. Again, the ecclesiological intimations appear: Here is a new church, and one hears in the background the voice of the one who promised that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. Thus was born what some call the American civil religion, a religion that is intricately intertwined with the religion that most Americans call Christian.

The church of the *novus ordo seclorum* had a thin public theology. As political philosopher Leo Strauss observed, its founding principles were "low but solid." Perhaps too low and not solid enough. To change the metaphor, the new order was not wired for first-principle questions such as the humanity and rights of slaves of African descent. As it is not wired for today's questions about the humanity and rights of the unborn child and others who cannot assert their rights. These are the questions at the vortex of what we call the culture wars. In the 1860s the church of the *novus ordo seclorum* was shattered by the bloodiest war in our history, and from that catastrophe emerged the greatest theologian of the civil religion. Lincoln's second inaugural address, with its profound reflection on the mysteries of providence, is in some ways worthy of St. Augustine—except, of course, without Augustine's Church and therefore without the communal bearer of the story of the world by which all other stories, including the story of America, are truly told.

American theology has suffered from an ecclesiological deficit, leading to an ecclesiological substitution of America for the Church through time. Alongside this development, and weaving its way in and out of it, is a radical and vaulting individualism that would transcend the creaturely limits of time, space, tradition, authority, and obedience to received truth. Here the prince of apostles is Ralph Waldo Emerson, and it is lit-

tle wonder that he is revered by Harold Bloom as the font of what he calls the American Religion. Here there is no doctrine other than what Emerson calls "the doctrine of the soul."

The many today who say they are interested in spirituality but not in religion are faithfully following in the tradition of Emerson's battle against tradition and the idea of the authoritative. Consider his powerful 1838 address to the divinity students at Harvard:

Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil. Friends enough you shall find who will hold up to your emulation Wesleys and Oberlins, Saints and Prophets. Thank God for these good men, but say, "I also am a man." Imitation cannot go above its model. The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity. The inventor did it, because it was natural to him, and so in him it has a charm. In the imitator, something else is natural, and he bereaves himself of his own beauty, to come short of another man's.

Surveying what he views as the corruptions of historic Christianity with its doctrines, rituals, and traditions of authority, Emerson declares, "The remedy to their deformity is, first, soul, and second, soul, and evermore, soul."

Emerson was surely right to say "imitation cannot go above its model," and the many who have followed him have, in fact, fallen far short of the Emersonian model. Witness the fate of what used to be called "liberal religion" in the form of Unitarian-Universalism or visit the shelves upon shelves in the "spirituality" section of your local bookstore. One can agree with Harold Bloom that gnosticism is the right word for it.

At the same time, there were other American Christians who, remembering the words of Jesus that the servant is not above his master, did not aspire to go above their model. The latter part of the nineteenth century, when almost all Protestants called themselves evangelicals, the nation witnessed the impressive construction of the "Benevolent Empire" in what is commonly designated the third great awakening. The social gospel movement, led by formidable figures such as Walter Rauschenbusch, embraced the goal of "Christianizing America and Americanizing Christianity." Once again the note is struck that America is not only a nation with the soul of a church but *is* the church. This self-understanding was soon to be shattered by the fundamentalist-modernist clash of the first part of the twentieth century, giving rise to the conviction that theology, so rife with conflict and divisiveness, must give way to something like a public philosophy.

Here the most notable figure is John Dewey who died in 1952 at age ninety-two, having presided for six decades as perhaps the most influential public intellectual in American life. Like so many liberal reformers of his time, Dewey was only one step away from the Protestant pulpit. *A Common Faith*, published in 1934, proposed a distinctively American religion that would leave behind the doctrinal and ecclesiological disputes of the hoary past and embrace all people of good will in the grand cause of progressive social reform. In what was deemed to be a post-Christian era, here was a new *novus ordo seclorum* with America as the elect people in the vanguard of leading history toward its liberal consummation.

Today, Richard Rorty, the grandson of Rauschenbusch, claims the mantle of Dewey. The common faith of the elect people lives on. In his 1998 *Achieving Our Country*, Rorty writes that Dewey and his soul-mate Walt Whitman "wanted [their] utopian America to replace God as the unconditional object of desire. They wanted the struggle for social justice to be the country's animating principle, the nation's soul." He quotes favorably the lines of Whitman: *And I call to mankind. Be not curious about God. / For I who am curious about each am not curious about God.* "Whitman and Dewey," Rorty writes, "gave us all the romance, and all the spiritual uplift we Americans need to go about our public business." In this he sets himself against other leftist thinkers whom he accuses of a "semi-conscious anti-Americanism which they carried over from the rage of the late 1960s."

Radical Christians' understanding of America's part in the world-historical scheme of things is very different, but Rorty shares with those radical Christians of an anti-American bent a belief that America is at center stage in the cosmic drama. For the followers of Rorty, America replaces God as "the unconditional object of desire," while for radical Christians, America is the Anti-Christ in pitched battle against God's purposes through time. Both are quintessentially American in their indifference to Augustine's City of God, intermingled with the earthly city and on pilgrimage toward the End Time, and in their indifference to the Church of Augustine that sustains that pilgrimage.

There have been other efforts to establish a public philosophy quite apart from over-arching claims of providential purpose. To cite an outstanding instance, thirty-four years ago John Rawls published *A Theory of Justice*. It will be remembered that, in this intricately reasoned work, Rawls proposed that reasonable persons motivated by self-interest and risk-aversion and unencumbered by a knowledge of their place in the

world could deliberate behind a “veil of ignorance” and agree upon the principles of a just society.

Rawls, to his great credit, helped revive an interest in political philosophy. Like Aristotle, and against the thinkers for whom politics is all procedure to the exclusion of ends, he understood that politics is the deliberation of how we ought to order our lives together. But his “oughtness” was assiduously insulated from what he called “comprehensive accounts” of history and the world, resulting in an esoteric theory of little use to the democratic deliberation of the question of how we ought to order our lives together. In that sense, Rawls is very un-American. From the Puritan beginnings to the Founding, from Emerson and Lincoln to Rauschenbusch and Dewey, Americans have been embroiled in comprehensive accounts, trying to make sense of the story of America within the story of the world.

Stephen Webb has recently published a little book titled *American Providence: A Nation with a Mission*. It is deserving of much more attention than it has received. Nor should we be ignoring the important contributions of Reinhold Niebuhr and his brother H. Richard Niebuhr, especially the latter’s *The Kingdom of God in America*. Reinhold was, I believe, much more of a Christian and much more of a Christian thinker than some of his contemporary critics allow. In many ways his sensibility might aptly be described as Augustinian. A half century ago and more, both Niebuhrs were in the long tradition of theologians wrestling with the story of America within the story of the world. Reinhold in particular was perhaps too much impressed by what he called the irony of American history. So skeptical was he of the pridefulness that often accompanied the idea of a national mission—one thinks, for instance, of the notion of “manifest destiny” and the purposes to which it was sometimes put—that he failed to engage constructively the irrepressible devotion to a national story, a line of devotion that runs from the errand into the wilderness to Martin Luther King Jr.’s “beloved community” to Ronald Reagan’s “city on a hill” and George W. Bush’s second inaugural on America’s appointed task in advancing freedom and democracy in the world.

There was another theologian who has an important place among those who have thought deeply about the American experiment: John Courtney Murray. Father Murray, who died in 1967, is best remembered for his part in the Second Vatican Council’s declaration on religious freedom. But his 1960 book *We Hold These Truths* is an unavoidable point of reference in discussions about America and providential purpose. He had the greatest admiration for the American founders, and admired most of all the modesty of their intention. This constitutional order, he insisted, rested

not upon “articles of faith” but upon “articles of peace.” Unlike so many others, Murray never confused America with the Church. As a Catholic, he already had a Church that claimed his prior allegiance. That Church is universal—as in “catholic”—and she has centuries of experience with nations, including nations with universal aspirations, that lay claim to that prior allegiance. We see again and again that, without a Church—not notional but real—that transcends the American experience, the American experience becomes one’s church.

James Madison wrote in his famed *Memorial and Remonstrance* that those who enter the political community must have a prior allegiance to God and the laws of God. That allegiance is prior in both time and priority. For Madison and so many others, however, that allegiance was not instantiated in a community that claimed priority to the political community. Thus, again, America itself became their de facto church. Indeed the fundamental charge of anti-Catholics in American history is that Catholicism requires a “dual loyalty”—an allegiance to America *and* a prior allegiance to the Church. That was, and is, exactly right. A prior allegiance is not necessarily a conflicting allegiance. Murray argued that the Catholic allegiance complemented and reinforced the allegiance to the American experiment. In this he agreed with the *Letter to Diognetus* that America is both homeland and foreign country.

Already in 1960, Murray saw that the Protestant establishment, and not least its theological establishment, had wearied of thinking about America in terms of divine providence. In *We Hold These Truths*, he anticipated a day when Catholics would have to catch the fallen flag of this *novus ordo seclorum*. Murray envisioned a democracy in which citizens are “locked in civil argument” about how we ought to order our life together. He believed that the genius of this American experiment, grounded in what he called the American Proposition, is to have provided the procedures and to have cultivated the habits by which the argument could continue until the final coming of the promised Kingdom—a coming uniquely anticipated in the eucharistic life of the Church.

Along the way to the Kingdom, he proposed that politics—the deliberation of how we ought to order our life together—be guided by natural law. Natural law is by definition not the property of any one religion or denomination, although it has been the providential task of the Catholic Church to guard and to propose again and again the truths of nature and nature’s God that were assumed by the American founders. “From the beginning,” wrote the second

century St. Irenaeus, "God had implanted in the heart of man the precepts of the natural law. Then He reminded him of them by giving the Decalogue."

The American founders, without exception, agreed. In the vision of John Courtney Murray, public discourse guided by appeal to natural law—and accompanied by the presence of a Church that effectively challenged democracy's idolatrous aspirations to ultimacy—could provide a public philosophy for sustaining the American experiment in producing as just and free a society as is possible in this our Babylonian exile from our true homeland.

Talk about a public philosophy for the American experiment strikes many today as nonsensical or utopian. In their view, a common public discourse has been shattered, leaving only the shards of myriad constructions of reality. Abandoning the idea of moral truth, politics is no longer the deliberation of how we ought to order our life together but is now, in the phrase of Alastair MacIntyre, warfare carried on by other means. All politics is combat politics. There is no longer, some say, a common American culture, and we should stop pretending that there is. There are only subcultures. Choose your subculture, take up its grievances, contentions, and slogans, and prepare to do battle against the enemy. Liberated from the delusion that we and our opponents can together say "We Hold These Truths," we are urged to recognize the futility of being locked in civil argument and accept the fact that there is no substitute for partisan victory.

Such, we are told, is our unhappy circumstance, and many think it not unhappy at all. They relish the battle, with no holds barred, no compromise, and their opponents' unconditional surrender as the goal. Our circumstance is not entirely new. Today's culture wars, as they are aptly called, bear striking similarities to the moral and political clashes prior to the Civil War. I recently had occasion to revisit Walter Lippmann's *The Public Philosophy*, on the fiftieth anniversary of its publication. There he describes a circumstance—before the civil-rights movement, before Vietnam, before the cultural and sexual revolutions, before *Roe v. Wade*, before wave upon wave of critical theory and deconstructionisms—not entirely unlike our own. That was a long time ago. It has been a long time since we have been locked in civil argument premised upon the confidence that we together "Hold These Truths." Incidentally, Lippmann's proposed remedy, to the extent he proposes a remedy, is a recovery of natural law. Although Lippmann was, however ambiguously, a Jew, Reinhold Niebuhr thought the book was altogether too Catholic.

It must be admitted that over these fifty years the churches have been of little help in restoring a politics

of democratic deliberation about how we ought to order our life together. Those churches—once called mainline, and now more aptly oldline and, increasingly, sideline—have planted the banner "Thus Saith the Lord" on the cultural and political platform of the Left. The evangelical Protestant insurgency has often planted the same banner on the cultural and political platform of the Right.

For the purposes of this reflection, it matters little that those on the Right have greater political potency. With notable exceptions, both are enemies of a religiously informed public philosophy for the American experiment; both contribute to the political corruption of Christian faith and the religious corruption of authentic politics.

As for the leadership of the Catholic Church in this country, it oscillates between, on the one hand, a touching desire to be accepted by the oldline, and, on the other hand, cobelligerency with evangelicalism on great moral and cultural questions. But there are also, let it be said, some Catholics, including bishops and theologians, who remember that the Church is to be the "contrast society" of Madison's prior allegiance. As such a contrast society, the Church is not above the fray, but neither is she captive to the fray. Her chief political contribution is to provide a transcendent horizon for our civil arguments, to counter the confusion of the political penultimate with the theological ultimate, and to insist that our common humanity with God's gift of reason is capable of a common deliberation about how we ought to order our life together.

And so we return to the beginning. When I meet God, I expect to meet him as an American. Not most importantly as an American, to be sure, but as someone who tried to take seriously, and tried to encourage others to take seriously, the story of America within the story of the world.

The argument, in short, is that God is not indifferent to the American experiment, and therefore we who are called to think about God and His ways through time dare not be indifferent to the American experiment. America is not uniquely Babylon, but it is our time and place in Babylon. We seek its peace in which we find our peace as we yearn for and eucharistically anticipate the New Jerusalem that is our pilgrim goal. It is time to think again—to think deeply, to think theologically—about the story of America and its place in the story of the world. Again, the words of Augustine: "It is beyond anything incredible that God should have willed the kingdoms of men, their dominations and their servitudes, to be outside the range of the laws of his providence." FT

The Secret of the Self

Wilfred M. McClay

Consider the obituary column in your local newspaper—not the obituary of anyone famous but just an ordinary obituary of an ordinary person from an ordinary place.

Consider it first as a surviving family member or friend, the one who has to gather the information for the obituary and select the appropriate facts. Many of us have had this experience and know how difficult and unsatisfying the process can be. The right balance between the competing demands of tenderness, respect, justice, loyalty, and candor is hard to find.

Consider, as well, what photograph of the deceased should be used to accompany the text. Rightly or wrongly, we grant enormous weight to the *image* in forming our enduring sense of the person. What image, in what setting and at what age, should be provided? Should the photograph be formal and artful, soberly and self-consciously posed? Or casual and spontaneous, a blithe and impromptu slice of life? Should it record youth, or maturity, or old age?

The sophisticated response to this string of questions is to assert that there is no such thing as a human totality or essence, and leave it at that. There is no unitary self, only—as Emerson once put it—a series of surfaces upon which we skate. But such a glib and weightless jibe, while it may be good enough for the seminar room, is no help. Obituaries must still be written, and photographs provided, because one's respects must be paid, and there are better and worse ways of going about it. The roughness of the judgments that life forces upon us does not excuse us from responsibility for making them.

Life rarely resembles a Hollywood movie, in which the hero goes out in a blaze of glory, leaving a trail of smiles, admiration, harmony, and contentment in his

wake. The actual end of most human lives is sad, painful, sometimes grueling, profoundly embarrassing, and pathetic, often leaving emptiness, loss, regret, relief, and other contradictory and disturbing emotions in its wake. And so one would never pick a death-bed photograph to accompany an obituary. (Indeed, it probably reveals something important about our age's sensibilities that we have come to find unthinkable ghouliness and unpleasant the once-venerable idea of creating a death mask as a memento of the departed.)

But why would one then feel bound to use an old-age photograph instead? Why not make the photograph stand as an idealized representation of the departed, not in a state of decline or debility, but at the pinnacle of physical strength and beauty—even if the face being rendered thereby is a face from thirty or forty years ago, a face much more attractive and cheerful, but one that almost no one still living would recognize?

We can see the logic in that choice and yet ask: What is really being memorialized by such a photograph? Doesn't such a choice imply that the aged are merely living on the downhill slope of life and that our essential nature is actually realized in youth or early adulthood, and that nothing worth representing or acknowledging is gained by subsequent experience—as though there were some brief and shining moment, at around the age of thirty-five, that one was at one's peak, was fully oneself, even if it hardly seemed thus at the time? One sometimes notices that women who die in their seventies and eighties are nevertheless represented in their obituaries by pictures taken in their twenties or early thirties. Is this merely an example of all-too-human vanity at work? Or is there an implicit judgment about when a woman is most fully herself? When we judge that a man is “past his prime,” does that statement carry a larger significance about the way we understand the relative dignity of life's passages?

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deplores, including the reduction of an ever-widening range of human activities and relations to the status of commodities and instruments, rather than ends in themselves.

One would be a bold prophet indeed to predict that this tendency will exhaust itself anytime soon. But things will start to change when we insist upon seeing the human person as the focal point of historical inquiry, the cynosure of historical meaning, the fleetingly visible figure to be sought in history's lavish carpet. The study of history is arid and incomplete unless it is understood as a work about (and by) individual human beings—and, moreover, a story whose substance and manner of telling are matters of moral significance. A shift from “self” to “person” can strengthen that endeavor. It can rescue the individual from being smothered by giant structural explanations, the prospect that Tocqueville feared. But it also can rescue the individual from being let loose into a whirling centrifuge of subjectivism and indeterminacy, a prospect even more inimical to historical understanding.

The recovery of the idea of the human person will necessarily entail a reappropriation of neglected religious and other longstanding moral and spiritual normative traditions. As Charles Taylor has argued in his magisterial study *Sources of the Self*, the coherence and integrity of the human person rests upon a moral foundation, on a set of presuppositions about the structure and teleology of the moral universe. A moral disposition toward one's world, and a prior assent to certain moral criteria, are the preconditions of there being any psychological order and consistency at all in a human personality. Health is built upon morality, and not vice versa. The concept of moral responsibility, which therapy would seek to banish or marginalize, turns out to be essential and inescapable. There is no value-neutral way of being happy and whole.

Martin Buber's 1938 essay “What is Man?” is still remarkably fresh and clarifying, stressing the “dialogic” and relational qualities for which Buber had become famous with his great 1936 book *I and Thou*. For Buber, the human person was reducible neither to the discrete features of individualism nor the collective ones of social aggregates, let alone the vagaries of language and discourse. The study of man, Buber asserted instead, must start with the consideration of “man *with* man.” If you begin there, “you see human life, dynamic, twofold, the giver and the receiver, he who does and he who endures, the attacking force and the defending force, the nature which investigates and the nature which supplies information, the request begged and granted—and always both together, completing one

another in mutual contribution, together showing forth man.”

Or, as the French Neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain put it nearly a decade later, “There is nothing more illusory than to pose the problem of the person and the common good in terms of opposition,” for in reality, it is “in the nature of things that man, as part of society, should be ordained to the common good.” The problem of the person “is posed in terms of reciprocal subordination and mutual implication.” Here one finds no concession either to the romance of the heroic atomic self or to the historiography of vast impersonal forces, or to the putative opposition between them.

One might go further and point out that the concept of “person” helps us understand human dignity as something deriving from the fact of one's intrinsic being—rather than from the extent of freestanding autonomy, the “quality of life,” that a person might demonstrate. Such a view would stand in the longer Western tradition of individualism, affirming the diversity of legitimate human roles and ranks in society as we find it. At the same time, it would be in direct competition to the increasingly influential view that the dignity of any individual life is dependent upon the competency of the individual, as though a self with a poor quality of life has a life not worth living.

One thing seems clear, however. We need to rescue the idea of individual dignity from its captivity in individual psychology and postmodernist subjectivity. And this is what the word “person” begins to accomplish. It reaffirms the core meaning of individualism with its insistence upon the ultimate value of the individual human being. But it also embraces the core insight of communitarianism: the recognition that the self is made in relationship and culture, and the richest forms of individuality cannot be achieved without the sustained company of others. And it would build upon Tocqueville's further insight that it is in the school of public life, and in the embrace and exercise of the title of “citizen,” that the selves of men and women become most meaningfully equal, individuated, and free—not in those fleeting, and often illusory, moments when they escape the constraints of society, and retreat into a zone of privacy, subjectivity, and endlessly reconstructed narratives of the “self.”

Henry James' celebrated story “The Figure in the Carpet,” a characteristically multilayered and inscrutable tale, relates the quest of an earnest young literary critic for the hidden meaning, “the undiscovered, not to say undiscoverable, secret,” animating the voluminous work of an eminent novelist named Hugh Vereker. What was sought by all critics, but grasped by none, was “the general intention”

behind all of Vereker's books, their unifying meaning. The critics and Vereker's other readers, though consistently mystified, were yet certain that "the thing we were all so blank about was vividly there. It was something . . . in the primal plan, something like a complex figure in a Persian carpet."

The story is a masterpiece of ambiguity, impossible to reduce to a single stable interpretation. Indeed, it can even be read as a mockery of the whole literary enterprise, pairing dull and uncomprehending readers who ploddingly manage to miss the obvious, with clever authors (both the fictional Vereker and the actual James) who feel compelled to play the trickster, taunting their readers with the hint that there is something—indeed, the whole point of it all—that they don't get.

Predictably, many recent critics, brilliantly managing to combine indeterminacy with reductionism, think the story is all about homosexuality and the epistemology of the closet. There are even Oz-like moments when one suspects that all the elaborate concealments exist to conceal precisely nothing, and the story is an exercise in mockery, put forward by an author who himself felt perpetually misunderstood and undervalued. Yet such a bitter and nihilistic interpretation is very hard to sustain in the end, and one is left instead with the sense that the search for a unifying idea—for the figure in the carpet—is a quest too compelling to refuse. The name "Vereker," after all, suggests some relationship to the truth.

And so the story teaches us something about how

to look for such things—if not necessarily to know when we have found them—and to know what kinds of secrets are worth pursuing. The great literary critic Frank Kermode wrote of "The Figure in the Carpet" that "Vereker's secret—'the thing for the critic to find'—is not, we infer, the sort of thing the celibate and impotent may look for when they speculate about sex. It is a triumph of patience, a quality pervading the life of the subject, like marriage. It is not the subject but the treatment, which is why it is a suffusing presence in all Vereker's work, and not a nugget hidden here or there. It is a matter of life and death and a matter of jokes and games. The error of criticism is a ludicrous one; it is also tragic."

We should avoid such errors in searching for the figure, for the human person. The suffusing presence will not be disclosed in a single fact-nugget, or by a dark secret, pulled from a personal diary or a police file or a divorce testimony or how-to manual. Instead, it is the sort of complex secret that reposes in plain view, an abiding condition that can only be seen, if at all, by standing still and looking, until the pattern emerges and makes meaningful the life of the subject.

It may be as hard to detect as the atmosphere. Or the enveloping climate of marriage. Or the light that rings the ordinary images of ordinary faces on the local paper's obituary page—or the shadowy depths beneath their smiles. Seeing it may well be a gift of grace. Yet such are the lights and shadows, and figures in the carpet, for which we should search. FT

December

December, the month of that most holy day,
which makes Christian even the falling snow.
(In whispers, the winds tell everything they know
to the forest and the pebbles in the river spray.)
Each soul, at this great story, awakes afresh,
reviving childhoods from ages gone by.
(The country churches speak out and testify,
and all the earth is one great festive crèche.)
Is it snowing again in the countryside?
Where homes, in vigil, comfort and console,
where words, now full of depth, are intensified,
Jesus, tonight, will come again and stay
with the beggar, the finch, and the wandering soul,
who, like a leaf, flutters along the way.

Fra Cesare Angelini (1887-1976)
translated by William Baer

God on the Internet

Jonathan V. Last

Even diligent students of the papacy may be unfamiliar with the pontificates of Michael and Pius XIII. Pope Michael, born David Bawden, was crowned on July 16, 1990. He has spent his papacy mostly at home, in Delia, Kansas, where he writes self-published books such as *Imposter Popes and Idol Altars*. Pope Pius XIII, born Earl Pulvermacher, was elevated on October 24, 1998, and currently takes Springdale, Washington, as his seat. Both popes appear in traditional papal vestments, both trace the origins of their particular schisms to the misdoings of John XXIII, and both—ah, yes—maintain websites from which they carry out their ministries.

On Pope Michael's webpage, for instance, you can sign up for his email list, order his writings, and follow links to his sister site, *Vatican in Exile*. Pius XIII's website is even more elaborate, boasting a lengthy biography of the pope, a catalogue of his encyclicals, and extensive works on the catechism and other aspects of Church life, dating back to when Earl Pulvermacher was a mere Capuchin priest.

In a simpler time, these two men might have been town eccentrics, doing no more than attracting the snickers of their neighbors. Today, thanks to the vast wiring of the world, their pages have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times, by onlookers from around the globe.

One hundred and twenty-eight million Americans use the web, and it has been integrated, if only as a formality, into nearly every facet of modern life. Law firms, politicians, manufacturers, charities, elementary schools—one is hard-pressed to find an entity without a web appendage.

This is true even—or perhaps the word is, particularly—for religious life. According to a 2004 Pew sur-

vey, 64 percent of Internet-using Americans—82 million people—say they use the web for religious purposes. They are more likely to be female, white, middle aged, and college educated. Catholics and Jews tend to use the Internet slightly more heavily than Protestants. Half of these users report that they attend church at least once a week.

Some of the pious web-surfers keep up with religious news (32 percent), some look for places to worship (17 percent), some use the Internet to plan religious group meetings (14 percent), and some to donate to charity (7 percent). At the same time, the Pew study claims, “the Internet seems to be fostering the development of religious and spiritual practices that are . . . more personally expressive and individually oriented.” Thus 11 percent of religious Internet users are going online to download spiritual music, 35 percent are sending online greeting cards, and 38 percent—the largest cohort—are simply passing along “email with spiritual content.”

The virtual religious universe is wide-ranging. The largest site is *Beliefnet.com*, a commercial, one-stop-shopping portal which serves evangelicals, Catholics, Scientologists, Earth worshippers, and everyone in between. Founded in 1999, *Beliefnet* attracts more than 20 million page-views a month and sends out 9 million free email newsletters a day to subscribers. Only a handful of other sites, such as *Catholic Online*, *Christianity Today*, and *Crosswalk* can claim readerships even close.

Meanwhile, there are all the endlessly proliferating weblogs. The first blogs appeared in 1999. By 2004 there were estimated to be some 4 million of them. Today the number is closer to 8 million. John Mark Reynolds, a philosophy professor at Biola University who organized, this past October, the first religious blogger convention, GodblogCon, says that there are “literally millions” of religious bloggers, but that “if

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you're talking about people who write for folk other than their immediate church family and their immediate community, there are a couple of thousand serious Godblogs." It is a sign of the metastasizing of blogs that within a few months of the announcement of the convention, the GodblogCon website already had two blogs about the upcoming event.

Unlike the big corporate sites, Godblogs have smaller readerships, ranging anywhere from *Fructus Ventris*, a blog run by a midwife, which gets about 115 page-views a day, to Amy Welborn's *Open Book*, which gets nearly twelve thousand. (In the world of Godblogs, more than two thousand page-views a day makes you a fairly heavy hitter.)

And then there are actual houses of worship. From Episcopal Grace Church in The Plains, Virginia, which serves 400 parishioners, to Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, an evangelical mega-church with 8,000 members, nearly every American church has its own webpage. Some are merely static placeholders with service times and driving directions; some are fully-interactive online communities where members can download audio files of sermons, order books, and even submit prayer requests.

On this score, Protestant churches are, in general, more advanced and ambitious than Catholic parishes. The notable exception is the Vatican's enormous, trench-deep site. Constructed in six languages, the Holy See's offering is the single most impressive religious undertaking on the web. Part tourist information booth, part Great Library, *Vatican.va* provides searchable access to important documents as well as information about nearly every aspect of the Church. When John Paul II first began failing last March, *Vatican.va* published his email address. He received over twenty-thousand well-wishing emails in a thirty-six-hour period.

This electronic outpouring of affection for the pope was fitting, since he had been something of an early proponent of the Internet. At the World Communications Day in 1990, John Paul II said the Church must use "the full potential of the 'computer age'"—this, at a time when the Internet barely existed. Two years later the Pontifical Council for Social Relations issued *Aetatis Novae* on the twentieth anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*, and while the document didn't mention the Internet specifically, it defined communication as an act of "giving of self in love." Insisting the Church must "communicate its message in a manner suited to each age," *Aetatis Novae* called emerging communication technologies "a marvelous expression of human genius" which would be "essential in evangelization and catechesis."

The capstone of the Vatican's endorsement of the Internet was John Paul II's apostolic letter about the New Media in January 2005. "New technologies," he wrote, "create further opportunities for communication understood as a service to the pastoral government and organization. . . . One clear example today is how the Internet not only provides resources for more information, but habituates persons to interactive communication." The pope warned that without proper formation, the Internet ran "the risk of manipulating and heavily conditioning, rather than serving people," yet he concluded, with his typically joyous faith, "Do not be afraid!"

Some websites bear out the Holy Father's highest hopes. *CatholicFind.com* is a simple and elegant search engine for the teachings of the Church. *Catholic-Hierarchy.org* gives readers an almanac-style view of the Church's structure. *CardinalRating.com* allows readers to research the views and writings of members of the College of Cardinals. Meanwhile, *Catholic.org* provides biographies of over seven thousand saints, together with explanations of the Sacraments, the Rosary, Lent, and other aspects of the faith. One of its sister sites, the *Oremus Network*, hosts a prayer circle that recruits people to commit to daily prayer.

While individual dioceses typically do little with their websites, certain religious orders hold grander visions. The Maryknoll Sisters, for instance, have an expansive web presence. After launching their page in 1997, the sisters performed a major upgrade in 2002, and about 55,000 visitors a month are attracted to their site, which Sister Helen Philips calls "a great instrument" for their work. Using the Internet, the sisters tell their missionary stories, fish for vocations, send out email newsletters, and even perform online fundraising.

And then there are the blogs. If sites like *Catholic.org* hold out the promise of becoming the new archives and compendiums, Godbloggers could, in the best of worlds, become the new apologists. Godbloggers hail from all walks of life, from professional writers such as Domenico Bettinelli, Eve Tushnet, and Dawn Eden to laymen with day jobs: Emily Peterson and Annie Banno, for instance, at the blog *After Abortion*, or Marc, a UNIX administrator, who runs the blog *Thickness*.

Many in consecrated life run blogs, too. There is a fairly large ring of seminarian blogs, such as Christopher Decker's *Road to Emmaus*, Dennis at *Vita Mea*, and Jeff Geerling's *Matthew 12:37*.

Priests have gotten in on blogging, too. Father Bryce Sibley's influential (although now dormant) blog, *A Saintly Salmagundi*, grew out of a bulletin board he kept as a seminarian in Rome in 1997. Sibley

would clip articles from the *Catholic Reporter* or *Modern Liturgy* and tack them to his board, inviting comment from passers by. It became so popular among his fellow seminarians that once he became a priest stationed in Parks, Louisiana, he decided to start his blog as a virtual version of the bulletin board. "It began as a tool for laughing at things and goofing around," he says, "which it still is, but it became a very powerful evangelical tool."

Sibley recognizes potential pitfalls, particularly the "vapid spirituality of the web." And he notes that in cyberspace, "Everyone can be their own magisterium"—a point the existence of Popes Michael and Pius XIII would seem to demonstrate. Even so, Sibley believes, the good outweighs the bad. "There's so much nuttiness—maybe in their own parish," he explains. "Or maybe there's a lack of guidance. And so people can come to the Internet and they can come to blogs to find out the truth about what's going on. And they can find answers to their faith." As an instance, Sibley points to recent emails from a woman who converted to Catholicism and two men who have been inspired to the priesthood: All three said that the blog world played some part in their decision.

The growth of priest blogs has been slow but steady. In 2002, when Sibley started blogging, there were only five or six. Today the number is closer to fifty. Most of them are small, personal affairs. Started in August of 2004, *Diary of a Suburban Priest* is run by "Father Ethan" and gets about two hundred page-views a day. And then there's Father Robert Johansen's *Thrown Back*. A parish priest in St. Joseph, Minnesota, Johansen was ordained in August 2001 and began blogging less than a year later. Like Sibley, Johansen sees the blog as "a good way to get the teachings of the Church out there." "I have found it to be a real extension of my priestly ministry," he explains. "Blogging is something that's been fed by my priestly ministry," Johansen says. "I blog frequently about things I encounter in my priestly ministry and it actually works vice versa as well. My blogging, and what I come to understand or learn from that, comes out in my preaching and my interaction with parishioners."

Each of these bloggers commands a tiny audience, between a few dozen and a few thousand visitors a day. But taken together the bloggers wield disproportionate power in the virtual world, through what Hugh Hewitt, author of the book *Blog*, calls a "blog swarm." Take, for example, the death of Terri Schiavo. Father Johansen was a long-time follower of the case, and he blogged about it often. On the strength of his blogging, he wrote a lengthy piece for *National Review Online*

that chronicled the issue. Amy Welborn and others blogged about Johansen's article. Eventually, his writing became part of the reportorial foundation for the movement which emerged to oppose Schiavo's execution and had more impact than any of the statements issued by American bishops or cardinals.

All these blogs share two distinguishing characteristics: They're Catholic, and they're conservative. As the GodblogCon organizer John Mark Reynolds explains, "Most Godblogs in the United States are going to end up being Roman Catholic because most people who are Christian in the United States, in the Nicene Christian sense, are Roman Catholic. . . . And taken as a whole in our culture, it has been harder for traditional theists to get a microphone than for secularists—at least in print. So blogging has been, by and large, better for the right religiously than for the left." Or, as Father Sibley puts it, "Orthodox blogs get more readership just as Rush Limbaugh gets more listeners than Air America does."

But the left has its own web presence. Father Richard Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation makes good use of the Internet at *CAC Radical Grace*, with online bookstores, an electronic version of the center's Meditation Garden, and even a section of Rohr's thoughts that functions like a blog. Mel White's *SoulForce*, a group dedicated to stopping "spiritual violence" against homosexuals, also has a sophisticated website, as do the Paulists with *Busted Halo*.

Busted Halo calls itself a site for "seekers," meaning those interested in finding a spiritual home. But more often than not it is simply a clearinghouse for leftist discontent. After Ronald Reagan died, the site's director emeritus, Father Brett Hoover, wrote,

I couldn't help it. "Good riddance," I mumbled, as the news came through that Ronald Wilson Reagan, 40th President of the United States, had died on Saturday, June 5, 2004.

In these days following his passing, it has seemed like nearly every other American was praising his achievements—the president-savior who gave us "morning in America," the tough guy who felled the Berlin Wall, the grandfatherly "Great Communicator" who reassured us.

I scowl, feeling like the man in Bermuda shorts at the winter formal. By my accounting, President Reagan bequeathed our world one nightmare after another. How does someone like me honestly mourn his passing?

About the election of Benedict XVI, *Busted Halo's* managing editor, Mike Hayes, wrote: "As the Papal conclave closed, fear crept into my heart. 'Anybody but Ratzinger,' I prayed. Moments before the

announcement of who was to succeed Pope John Paul II, I even said to myself, 'If it's Ratzinger, I'm becoming an Episcopalian.'" Unlike the websites of Popes Michael and Pius XIII, *Busted Halo* carries the official seal of an actual Church-sanctioned society, which might leave some seekers confused. Blogger Amy Welborn says the Internet gives seekers the opportunity to "quietly observe the church or the faith; it's like sneaking into the back pew of a church." The problem is that in the virtual church of the web, the hymnal one finds in the back pew may be quite different from the hymnal in the front pew.

There are other troubling features of the web. It lends itself easily to politicization—as Father Hoover demonstrated with his "Good Riddance to Reagan" essay. *Your Catholic Voice* is a political action group devoted to "shaping" the government, "from the County Courthouse to the halls of Congress." The website *Priests for Life* is similarly engaged in the nuts-and-bolts of political action. And occasionally serious people like Father Sibley are also sucked down by the allure of the Internet's political reductionism. On March 4, 2005 he blogged: "This morning I went to visit the fourth grade class at the local Catholic Grade School to allow them to ask me questions. During our little session one child asked me, 'Father, why can't kids at public schools pray in class?' I realized that this was a perfect moment for evangelization, so I walked to the chalkboard and told the kids that I would answer the question and teach them a new word. So I wrote in capital letters on the chalkboard: L-I-B-E-R-A-L-S."

Another reason for the tyranny of the banal is the web's general disposition toward consumerism. The Internet is filled with stores and businesses designed to siphon money from the faithful. There's *CatholicStore.com* and the *Discount Catholic Store* and *Catholic Supply* (your source for GiggleWings® guardian angel dolls). Protestants have an array of shopping options, too. From *Biblical Expressions* to *ShoppersForJesus.com*, every conceivable bit of religious schmaltz is available online for immediate shipping. At *Biblical-Gifts.com* you can find a 24-carat-gold cross with a vial of water from the Jordan River. At *Abbey Trade* you can get "Blessings in a Bottle"—small inspirational messages stored in decorative bottles. At the *Heavenly Hut* you can buy Christian nightlights. *Kerusso.com* (company motto: "Innovation That Inspires") offers Jesus poker chips—because "Jesus went all in for you!"

A more personal strain of consumerism leads people such as Stephen Ray to hawk their wares on the web. Ray, the author of several religious books, runs a

website called *Defenders of the Catholic Faith*. On it he features a photo album of his family and his travels, conversion testimonials from readers, and even his own blog. But the primary mission of *Defenders of the Catholic Faith* is to move product. Books, audio tapes, videos, DVDs—it's all there, mingled with explanations of "Why I'm Catholic" and lessons about St. Mark. There's also a press kit describing Ray, showing his upcoming speaking schedule, and telling you how to book him at your event for a mere \$600, plus expenses. (That's for local talks; overnight events are \$1,800, plus expenses and, as his site explains, "Steve rarely travels without his wife Janet.")

Dating services are trying to cash in on religion, too, whether it's *Catholic Singles*, *JDate* ("the largest Jewish singles network"), *dharmaMatch* ("where spiritual singles meet"), or *Spirit Personals*, a site with every possible permutation, from Christian, to Jewish, to lesbian matches: "*SpiritGayandLesbianSingles* promotes personal and spiritual growth, while encouraging a healthy lifestyle. Whether you're interested in a sexy, traditional relationship or fun alternative online dating, we have what you need. Join now to enjoy your free membership!"

If you meet the partner of your dreams online, get married, and find things rocky, the web can help there, too. *ExceptionalMarriages.com* offers counseling and aid in the form of quizzes designed to test the health of your marriage, an advice blog, tele-counseling services, and a store with enough books, videos, and trinkets to fix any relationship, traditional or alternative. Think of it as the virtual mall for spirituality: Shopping, entertainment, and socializing—everything the faithful soul needs for earthly comfort, all marketed with the shiny gloss of religious morality.

Nowhere is the shape of modern religion better displayed than at *Beliefnet*, the *ur*-religious destination on the Internet. *Beliefnet* was launched in 1999 by Steve Waldman, a former national editor of *U.S. News & World Report*, and carried the mission statement promising to "Help People Meet Their Spiritual Needs." To that end, Waldman originally designed *Beliefnet* to be a giant ecumenical web magazine, treating all faiths with the same degree of solicitousness. (During its webzine phase, I was a frequent contributor.) As the dot.com bubble burst, *Beliefnet* found itself in financial trouble. Casting about for additional revenue streams, the editors began designing and hosting church websites, but quickly found that market unfruitful. They then began offering email newsletters, into which advertising could be inserted—and that proved an enormous success. Today 4.5 million people are signed up and *Beliefnet*

sends out some 9 million newsletters daily. The newsletters, Waldman says, offer “stuff for the head, stuff for the heart, and stuff for the soul.”

There are nineteen categories of *Beliefnet* newsletters, the most heavily subscribed of which is the Daily Inspiration, which carry messages such as “Laughter is the shortest distance between two people (Victor Borge).” Other heavily-subscribed to newsletter categories include the Angel of the Day (“Let your spirit burst forth like the sun’s rays and bask in the glow of your angel’s benevolence”), Daily Religious Jokes, and Astrology. The taste of the market may be illustrated by the fact that 2.4 million people are signed up for the Daily Inspiration, while 1.5 million are signed up for the Daily Bible Reading; 850,000 are signed up for the Angel of the Day, while 369,000 are signed up for the Daily Prayer.

But perhaps the hopes and needs of *Beliefnet* readers are captured most clearly by the advertisers pursuing them. Sign up for the newsletters and you’ll get a raft of advertisements, both embedded into the email and sent under a separate cover from “*Beliefnet* Partners.” Andrew Weill, the bald, bearded vitamin guru, is a *Beliefnet* partner, as is the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health. DebtSX sends *Beliefnet* subscribers emails offering those struggling with debt a way to “get help now.” Soulmatch, another religious dating service (which is owned and operated by *Beliefnet*) also touts itself to subscribers, asking “Does God want you to be happy?” Dr. Susan Larson hawks her nutrition program explaining “Why diets don’t work for women over 40.”

This last topic is such a hit that *Beliefnet* recently launched a “Spiritual Weightloss” newsletter, which echoes the call of Joan Cavanaugh and Pat Forseth’s 1976 book, *More of Jesus, Less of Me*. But even here, *Beliefnet* takes a more ecumenical angle: One recent Spiritual Weightloss newsletter used George Bernard Shaw as inspiration, saying “Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.”

The newsletters are designed to pull people onto the *Beliefnet* website where they can read stories about Wiccan Love Potions or participate in Virtual Conclaves or take quizzes about “the spiritual side of sleep.” There is even, for those just stepping up to the table, the Belief-O-Matic™—a battery of questions designed to help you determine whether your natural preferences make Liberal Quakerism, Unitarian Universalism, Neo-Paganism—or something else altogether—fit you best. My own turn at the Belief-O-Matic™ revealed there was a 100 percent fit between myself and “Mainline to Liberal Christian Protestants” and a 96 percent fit with the Baha’i faith.

Beliefnet also offers its own blogs, as well as a blog of blogs, called *BlogHeaven*, “where faith blogs go if they’re good.” And there’s loads of interactivity, from message boards to chat rooms to comment bars. “The user can customize their experience so much that it can be kind of a vertical experience or a horizontal experience,” Waldman explains, “depending on who you are at that moment.”

Waldman takes an ad-executive’s approach toward religion. “The Internet certainly makes it a wide-open marketplace, but the existing brands will have an advantage,” he says.

There’s been this move toward the creation of a religious marketplace. The Internet accelerates that. You can’t count on the propagation of your faith just from the fact that your parents were of a certain faith and they’re going to pass it down to their kids, because people are just exposed to too many other ideas and faiths now, so the faiths—the religions—have to understand that they’re competing. . . . People now view themselves a little bit as spiritual consumers, and they’re getting stuff from all over the place—books, music, TV shows, movies—and I’m not saying if it’s good or bad, that’s just the world we’re in now. And the Internet is a key player in accelerating that and probably accentuating both the positive and negative aspects of that trend: The negative being the kind of dilettante-ish surfing for designer religions. . . . But on the other hand a lot of people, through the Internet, have found a serious faith connection that’s really brought them closer to God and improved their lives.

For its part, *Beliefnet* continues to roll along, gobbling up new email subscribers at a rate of nearly fifteen thousand a day. The site has a four-book package with Doubleday, the first two books, on Evangelical Christianity and Kabbalah, due this Spring. They also have deals with wireless phone companies—“so you can get prayer on your cell phone”—and offer a large set of “religious ring-tones,” from the Christian pop sounds of Amy Grant to the theme song from *The Dukes of Hazzard*, at \$1.99 a shot. *Beliefnet* is, quite successfully, helping people meet what they perceive as their spiritual needs.

Which should worry us all—for perceived needs aren’t always the same thing as genuine needs, and answers to bad questions can turn into very, very bad answers. Something is happening at the intersection of religion and the Internet that is like the old denominationalization of American sects raised to a new and frightening power. On the Internet, those dissatisfied with what they find in their religious brick-and-mortar communities can simply retreat into

a virtual world in which they are surrounded entirely by like-minded people.

Dissatisfied with Cardinal McCarrick's wishy-washiness on pro-abortion Catholic politicians? Blogger Domenico Bettinelli sounds off about it so you can take comfort at his site. Unhappy with the liberal rector of your own parish? Find a conservative priest online to whom you can turn. It's happening all the time. As Father Johansen tells it, "I get pretty regular emails from people asking me for advice on this issue or that, frequently because they feel that they can't rely on the priests in their own area, unfortunately, so they read my blog and they decide, 'Well, Fr. Rob is somebody I think I can rely on and I'll ask what he thinks.'"

"The world is breaking up," the mad poet Robert Bly once intoned, "into small communities of the saved." These communities have resulted in the rise of what is known on the web as "Saint Blog's Parish," a ring of 758 websites where compatible Catholic bloggers can join forces to establish their own small group. Nearly every blogger links to similar bloggers, who link on to other bloggers, who all link back to the first site, until the circle closes and something emerges that does, in fact, look like a community. And yet, it is a community based on like-mindedness and tied together by remote interaction—which makes for a very strange community, indeed.

Another concern is how the Internet is demystifying religion. One of Joseph de Maistre's pet theories was that the authority of the Church depended in large part on mystery. Blogger Mickey Kaus recently wondered if the notion of mysterious silence on the part of religious institutions has become outmoded: "If you were a respected authority you used to be able to get away with maintaining a meaningful silence. Now you've got to be blogging in your own 'unique voice' about every little thing that comes up, or else some ambitious lesser authority who posts more frequently will steal your flock."

Beliefnet's founder Steve Waldman speaks reverently of this new transparency. "We're now in a world where the majority of people live in democratic countries," he says. "People haven't grappled fully with what the implications of that are for religion. . . . People in the suburbs go to their PTA meetings and ask their principal for the budget, and they get it. . . . They ask for information about their health plan, and they get it. Transparency is all around them, and so it would just seem natural to demand that of your church. The more democracy is everywhere, the more people may, for better or for worse, attempt to demand things of religious leaders. The Internet is part of that story."

Of course, it's one thing to want to know your

church's budget, and quite another thing to want to know why Mass is taking so long. Last March the priest-blogger Father Ethan ran a post asking, "A good priest friend of mine . . . wants to know about Mass lengths. He says, 'All things being equal, (as much as is possible to imagine) at what point do people feel short-changed, and at what point do they feel *Father needs to move things along*.'"

Whether or not authority suffers from the disappearance of mystery, certainly the power of ritual is diminished by having every conversation in the sacristy broadcast for public consumption.

The next stop may be the digitizing of religious practice. Online confessions have been around at least since 1997, and although the Catholic Church has rejected the practice, that hasn't closed down all the virtual confessionals. At *Absolution-Online.com*, for instance, you can enter the virtual booth, select your sins from five general classes of misdoing, and then proceed to the automated confessor, which doles out punishments normally consisting of some combination of fasting, Our Fathers, and Hail Marys. Although there is a disclaimer saying that the e-confessional isn't sanctioned by the Catholic Church, most of its language is taken from the sacramental texts. *Absolution-Online.com* is also one of several sites that offers a virtual rosary. The website *Universalis* does an online version of the Liturgy of the Hours. Elsewhere there are cyber *Seders* and even Internet muftis.

Beliefnet's Waldman thinks that this distancing of the self from the religious act can be helpful. "The anonymity of the Internet is what makes it work so well for religion," he says. "It's the flip side of why porn spreads. The same phenomenon that has led to pornography spreading, a variant of that has made religion one of the most popular topics online. It's that you can explore religious matters in the privacy of your own home; ask questions you might be embarrassed to ask; have conversations with people with some anonymity; and do it anytime day or night." This "anonymity combined with intimacy," Waldman says, makes people "more inclined to open up," since they aren't revealing themselves totally.

To which one wants to say: Doesn't that metaphor give you pause? Is a technique that has made pornography into the Internet's number-one business really a good idea for religion, the Internet's number-two business?

The failure of anonymous online pornography to be real sex is also the failure of anonymous online churching to be real religion: In both sex and religion, incarnation—the physical body—turns out to matter a great deal.

Back in February 2002, Archbishop John Foley, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, released two documents: "The Church and the Internet" and "Ethics in Internet." "The Church and the Internet" is a perceptive survey of the promises and dangers of the medium. Foley recognized that there are "benefits more or less peculiar to the Internet" in terms of geographical and temporal access to information and warned that "hanging back timidly from fear of technology or for some other reason is not acceptable" to the Church. And yet, he observed, "already, the two-way interactivity of the Internet is blurring the old distinction between those who communicate and those who receive what is communicated." He also warned that aside from the obvious evils of luring users to pornography and drawing them into fetid hatreds, the Internet also carries the danger of fostering "consumerism" and "pathological isolation."

"Ethics in Internet" explored these concerns more fully: "It takes no great stretch of the imagination to envisage the earth as an interconnected globe humming with electronic transmissions—a chattering planet nestled in the provident silence of space." The web "lends itself equally well to active participation and to passive absorption. . . . It can be used to break down the isolation of individuals and groups or to deepen it."

Later in the document, Foley moaned, in the approved Al Gore style of those days, about "digital divide," "cultural imperialism," and "transnational corporations." But he did understand something about the dangers of weakened incarnation. "Virtual reality is no substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other

sacraments, and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood community," he wrote. "There are no sacraments on the Internet; and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace of God are insufficient apart from real-world interaction with other persons of faith."

Father Johansen adds that "Where we encounter mystery primarily is in the liturgy, in prayer. . . . The Internet can't replace those things." To their credit, many of the Godbloggers understand this, too. That's why they convened in California last October to see, touch, and talk to one another at the Godblog convention. As Professor Reynolds explains: "Kneeling, on a kneeler made of oak, in front of a priest with trembling hands handing you the very Body and Blood of Christ which you taste and touch and smell is different than mouse-clicking your way through reality. . . . Is [the Internet] real fellowship? No, I don't think so. I view it more as co-laboring."

A tool for co-laboring. That's the most we might hope for. And in the days of Pope Pius XIII and ceaseless politicking and Spiritual Weightloss, even that much seems a pipe dream. The great blessing of the Internet is that it lets people find each other. Of course, this is the great curse of the Internet as well—for not only can model-train collectors share their joint enthusiasm, but so can anti-Semites, child molesters, and gang members. But even at its best, the Internet is a weakening of reality, and with its consumer satisfactions, politicizing impulses, and substitutions for the body, it constantly lures us up into thinner and thinner air. Isn't religion supposed to enrich the world around us instead? Shut off your computer. Take a deep breath. Go to church. FT

78 Flavors

Next in line, we get the blues from
Having too much choice to choose from.
Later on, will we atone
For just a plain vanilla cone?

Daniel Waters

Almonds to Zooof— The Year in Books

John Wilson

The era of the book is coming to a close. No one knows the day or hour, but inventor Ray Kurzweil says it will be soon. The fate of the book is merely a detail in the sweeping vision of Kurzweil's *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (Viking), but it is exemplary: Just as humans are transcending through biotechnology the limitations of their bodies, so the husk of the book will be shed to make its kernel digitally available.

The transition will not be painless, Kurzweil concedes. He frankly acknowledges the flaws of what he calls "false pretenders," the first wave of electronic books, which offer extraordinary glimpses of the wonders to come—think of the CD-ROM version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the vast digital library of patristic texts—but which still lack "the superb visual characteristics of paper and ink."

And the scale of the great conversion is daunting: "There are major efforts under way to scan and digitize print materials, but it will be a long time before the electronic databases have a comparable wealth of material." Meaning that we shouldn't expect an eye-friendly, read-in-bed, digital version of Erle Stanley Gardner's *The Case of the Drowsy Mosquito* anytime soon.

Nevertheless, Kurzweil remains confident that all obstacles can be overcome: "Everything—including physical products, once nanotechnology-based manufacturing becomes a reality in about twenty years—is becoming information," and much of what we take for granted about the world and our place in it will be spectacularly disconfirmed.

JOHN WILSON is the editor of *Books & Culture*, a bimonthly review, and of *The Best Christian Writing 2006* (Jossey-Bass).

Funny how all the most widely trumpeted book-writing prophets of the year want to open our eyes to a reality obscured by the quotidian hustle-and-bustle. But where Kurzweil, a techno-utopian St. Paul, speaks of humans transcending biology—"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"—most of our Jeremiahs see instead a hubris in our global civilization that is certain to lead to destruction unless we repent and change our ways.

A book published on the cusp of 2005 set the tone for the year: Jared Diamond's *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (Viking), which enjoyed a long run on bestseller lists. "It is probably the most important book you will ever read," said *Science* magazine's reviewer. Diamond suggests that the collapse of earlier societies in diverse times and places—the Maya, the Anasazi, Norse Greenland, and Easter Island—are among his admonitory case studies—illuminates our situation today. Either we face squarely the urgent environmental crisis—so his argument goes—or acquiesce to catastrophic failure. (A word to the wise: the Norse settlers on Greenland squandered precious resources on building churches, and look what happened to them. Enough said?)

Remember the *Wired* magazine cover-story of a few years back, "The Long Boom?" James Howard Kunstler, whose earlier book *The Geography of Nowhere* is essential reading for students of suburban sprawl, counters with *The Long Emergency: Surviving the Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-first Century* (Atlantic Monthly Press). But Kunstler's forecast is as much wish-fulfillment as dire prophecy. The future he sees resembles America's past. Yes, living in a time of dwindling oil production will take its toll, but local economies will reassert themselves—"a pattern of

small towns surrounded by productive farmland” — and we will go back to the horse. Meanwhile, the dreaded suburbs will be depopulated. You can practically hear Kunstler smacking his lips in satisfaction at the image of those soulless enclaves abandoned and settling into decay. No more sprawl!

It's not clear how serious Kunstler is about his predictions, even as he embarks on another scolding of feckless optimists, but—based on his writing—he would make a lively guest. If you're planning a dinner party, you might invite him along with Paul S. Martin, whose *Twilight of the Mammoths: Ice Age Extinctions and the Rewilding of America* (California) advocates “resurrection ecology.” As Martin observes, “the human species has a profound interest in and attachment to large animals.” To the extent that the species which once roamed America are extinct, he adds, we might consider suitable substitutes, such as “the browsing black and the grass-eating white rhinoceros,” not to mention “free-ranging elephant herds.” I for one think it's a splendid idea, though Martin is certainly right to caution that “restoration of our large native carnivores would be more controversial.” And if your idea of a good dinner party is one that produces fireworks, add Michael Crichton to the guest-list—his *State of Fear* (HarperCollins) is a wickedly satirical nose-thumbing at the scientific consensus on global warming and at fear-mongering in general—along with Peter Huber, author of *The Bottomless Well: The Twilight of Fuel, the Virtue of Waste, and Why We Will Never Run Out of Energy* (Basic).

In enumerating “converging catastrophes” Kunstler devotes only a few of his pages to epidemic disease, but others have not been so stinting. See for example Mike Davis' *The Monster at Our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu* (New Press). You won't be surprised to learn that the villain-in-chief is George W. Bush. Then there are the tales of disasters past, such as Simon Winchester's *A Crack in the Edge of the World: America and the Great Earthquake of 1906* (HarperCollins) and Jay Feldman's *When the Mississippi Ran Backwards: Empire, Intrigue, Murder, and the New Madrid Earthquakes* (Free Press).

Lee Clarke, meanwhile, wants us to spend more time considering what-ifs that are admittedly improbable but that *could* happen—an asteroid striking the Earth, for instance. In *Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination* (Chicago), Clarke argues that risk-assessment policymaking is based too heavily on probabilistic thinking and not enough on possibilistic thinking. After all, Clarke reminds us, unlikely events occur every day, and, viewed with sufficient detachment (say, from the perspective of a professor of disaster studies), catastrophes are normal.

What about man-made catastrophes, such as Darfur, documented in *War and Faith in Sudan* (Eerdmans) by Gabriel Meyer with photos by James Nicholls, and *Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide*, by Gerard Prunier (Cornell)? These too are “normal” from a certain point of view.

If you want a meatier historical account of predictive thinking with a narrower focus and considerably more depth than Clarke's approach allows, there's Katharine Anderson's *Predicting the Weather: Victorians and the Science of Meteorology* (Chicago), which touches on some of the theological issues raised by prediction. And if Katrina and Rita are still on your mind, the book you want is Kerry Emanuel's *Divine Winds: The History and Science of Hurricanes* (Oxford), which I wish some of the pundits had read. About the connection of global warming to increased frequency and increased intensity of hurricanes, Emanuel says there's no evidence either way yet on frequency, while current estimates suggest that “hurricane potential intensity increases by about 5 mph for each 1°F increase of tropical sea surface temperature,” a measured assessment hardly commensurate with the inferences made in many articles post-Katrina.

Read enough of these books and you're likely to be more impressed by human vulnerability than by the godlike powers Kurzweil sees within our reach. Certainly it seems prudent to do what we can to reduce human impact on global warming, for example, without the quasi-religious fervor that animates so many discussions of this subject—in other words, to plan as best as we can for as many contingencies as we can reasonably handle, and to repose our ultimate trust in God.

Most of the books published in the United States in 2005, of course, proceeded on the assumption that the world as we know it is not about to undergo radical change—at least not until next Tuesday. Each year features improbable clusters of books, the most striking of which in 2005 comprised no fewer than four books devoted to bees and honey: Hattie Ellis' *Sweetness and Light: The Mysterious History of the Honeybee* (Harmony); Holley Bishop's *Robbing the Bees: A Biography of Honey—The Sweet Liquid Gold that Seduced the World* (Free Press); Tammy Horn's *Bees in America: How the Honey Bee Shaped a Nation* (Kentucky); and Stephen Buchmann's *Letters from the Hive: An Intimate History of Bees, Honey, and Humankind* (Bantam). The genre that has already produced histories of salt, and the mirror, and the color blue—and, in 2005, *A History of the World in Six Glasses*, by Tom Standage (Walker)—has clearly run amok. Still,

such is the appeal of the subject, I parted with these books reluctantly (dutifully dispatching them to a reviewer for the magazine I edit), and I hope to catch up with them next summer, not least to learn how the honeybee shaped a nation.

With the bees come the birds and their songs: Donald Kroodsma's *The Singing Life of Birds: The Art and Science of Listening to Birdsong* (Houghton Mifflin); David Rothenberg's *Why Birds Sing: A Journey into the Mystery of Bird Song* (Basic); and Don Stap's *Birdsong: A Natural History* (Scribner). Kroodsma's book has a CD enclosed, while it's possible to order a CD that Rothenberg produced with the same title as his book. The three books complement one another nicely. Kroodsma is an ornithologist who has devoted decades to the subject. His knowledge is awe-inspiring, his passion winsome, his minute observation obsessive, well-nigh crazed. Rothenberg, a wide-ranging philosopher, is the most interesting writer of the three but also—on occasion—the most irritating. (If you like this book, you might want to check out Rothenberg's *Sudden Music: Improvisation, Sound, Nature*, published in 2002 by University of Georgia Press with an accompanying CD.) Stap is the most straightforward—and he says a good deal about Kroodsma, so his may be the one to start with.

If you become besotted with the subject and three books just aren't enough, there's *Nature's Music: The Science of Birdsong*, edited by Peter Marler and Hans Slabbekoorn (Elsevier), from 2004, with two accompanying CDs. Like Kroodsma, Marler (his senior) is a major figure in the field; he appears in Stap's narrative as well. Some of the essays are tedious, at least for an amateur reader; others are more rewarding. Warning: All of the books except Stap's include sonograms and in some cases other diagrams, tables, etc. I found the sonograms mostly frustrating (no doubt due to my ignorance and obtuseness). If I am going to get much from them, it will have to be on another reading. But all four books have plenty to offer, even for the ordinary bird-lover.

Why *do* birds sing? For all kinds of reasons, exhaustively elaborated in these volumes, but finally for a reason that transcends reason.

Years ago in Pasadena, my friend Bill Tunilla and I would while away hours in his bookstore, The House of Fiction, making up reading lists for seminars we'd like to take in an imaginary university. I have such a list in mind right now, consisting of three books. The first is Oliver O'Donovan's *The Ways of Judgment* (Eerdmans), a continuation of the magisterial "political theology" he began a decade ago with *The Desire of the Nations*. The second is Paul Berman's

Power and the Idealists: Or, The Passion of Joschka Fischer and Its Aftermath (Soft Skull), a brilliant account of liberal interventionism ranging from 1968 to 2005. And last, the joker in the deck, Jon Ronson's *The Men Who Stare at Goats* (Simon & Schuster), the most undernoticed book I've read this year, which deals with psychic spies and others in the American military over the last twenty-five years who have, shall we say, thought outside the box. (I'd describe Ronson's book as "the most underrated," but not many people have bothered to rate it one way or another.) All I want is to read these books in the company of an excellent professor and some interesting people with no patience for banalities or cant.

Impatience verging on contempt—impatience that flatters itself—is a temptation, I know, that increases with age, and I find myself having to resist it now and then. But sometimes impatience is justified. I find it harder and harder to read memoirs these days, and I don't think the fault is all mine. I'm weary of the stratagems, weary too of the sheer detritus of all these lives.

Some, though, slip through my defenses: for instance, the poet W.S. Merwin's *Summer Doorways* (Shoemaker & Hoard), about his travels as a young man in Europe, which I picked up because I so much enjoyed his earlier book in the same vein, *The Mays of Ventadorn* (National Geographic Directions). The novelist David Plante's *American Ghosts* (Beacon), about his estrangement from and tentative reconciliation with his French Catholic origins. The novelist Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (Knopf).

But clearly the most powerful memoir I read this year, and her strongest book in years, was Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* (Knopf), about her coming to terms with the fatal heart attack of her husband of forty years, John Gregory Dunne, and the mysterious illness of their daughter, Quintana, who died a few weeks before the book was published this fall. At the book's core is a recurring motif, a credo, a statement of anti-faith: "No eye was on the sparrow." Against this I set the memory of my mother and grandmother in church, singing a duet: "His eye is on the sparrow." As Pascal says, we make our wager.

Not a memoir but a series of meditations occasioned by everyday joys and sorrows, Fae Malania's *The Quantity of a Hazelnut* (Seabury) was first published by Knopf in the 1960s. Long out of print and forgotten, it was brought back to view thanks to the novelist Marly Youmans, who became acquainted with the octogenarian Malania in Cooperstown, New York. One of my favorite books of the year, it's also a lovely object, as a good book should be, a nice size to slip into a coat pocket for the train.

A while back I attended a conference at which several speakers explained why no one is doing apologetics these days. It had something to do with our post-modern condition. I was puzzled, since it has seemed to me that apologetics is flourishing, and in many different varieties. If I were returning to that conference today, I'd take along copies of four books: Avery Dulles' *History of Apologetics* (Ignatius), Debra Rienstra's *So Much More: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* (Jossey-Bass), Eric Mextaxas' *Everything You Always Wanted to Ask About God (But Were Afraid to Ask)* (Waterbrook), and Nathan L. K. Bierma's *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth: Connecting This Life to the Next* (P&R). I might also take a copy of Bruce Hindmarsh's *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford) for a conversation about what has changed (and what hasn't) between the period of Hindmarsh's study and now—although with the stipulation that no one can use the word “postmodern.”

Years ago, I studied literature with the intensity of a medieval commentator bent over the sacred text. This was at the very end of Literary Criticism, just before Theory began to take over. A review by Guy Davenport around 1970—in *National Review*, perhaps?—introduced me to one of the twentieth century's great critics, the Russian Viktor Shklovsky, for whom the label “critic” is as inadequate as it is for Davenport's friend Hugh Kenner. I was soon to meet Shklovsky again in Nadezhda Mandelstam's extraordinary memoirs. And I read everything by him that was translated into English as it appeared.

It was Shklovsky's ironic fate to become known to a generation of American students via a couple of often-anthologized essays as a founder of Formalism and hence a precursor of Theory. Others soon surpassed him in that ill-fitting guise. Now, after a long hiatus, Shklovsky's faithful translator, Richard Sheldon, has rendered another volume: *Knight's Move* (Dalkey Archive), a book from which English readers have known only scattered quotations over the years.

Also salvaged from the vaults is Czeslaw Milosz's *Legends of Modernity: Essays and Letters from Occupied Poland, 1942-1943* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), translated from the Polish by Madeline G. Levine. And speaking of Polish writers, Yale University Press is continuing with their splendid project to make the works of Witold Gombrowicz accessible in good translations. The latest book to appear is the eerie novel *Cosmos*. The version I first read in English years ago was a translation of a French translation. (That was in a more innocent age, when Gombrowicz had a whiff of the transgressive and was published by Grove Press.)

This new edition is translated from the Polish by Danuta Borchardt, who earlier did a new translation of *Ferdynand* in the Yale series.

There is still some literary criticism being written, against all odds, and some of it is worth reading, such as Helen Vendler's *Invisible Listeners: Lyric Intimacy in Herbert, Whitman, and Ashbery* (Princeton) and Roberto Calasso's *K*. (Knopf), a reading of Kafka (especially *The Castle*) that will send you back to his books with fresh eyes. And some acute criticism goes on under the rubric of literary biography. By far the best of the year, among those I read or nosed around in—indeed, one of best literary biographies in years—was the novelist Jonathan Coe's *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B.S. Johnson* (Continuum), which tells how a writer took certain fashionably avant-garde notions about fiction to their logical conclusion: suicide, both artistic and personal. Also on the year's shortlist I'd put Andrew Delbanco's *Melville: His World and Work* (Knopf), Steven G. Kellman's *Redemption: The Life of Henry Roth* (Norton), and John Haffenden's *William Empson: Vol. 1, Among the Mandarins* (Oxford), the latter verging on hagiography and much too long but indispensable nonetheless, not least for its inadvertent insights into Empson's hatred of Christianity.

Stacked by my side of the bed are several piles of books, including novels old and new. In the old category, for instance, I have been re-reading *Moby-Dick* and Samuel Beckett's trilogy. Thanks to my brother Rick, I have been pleasurably making my way through the thirty mystery novels published by a British writer under the name Andrew Garve between 1950 and 1978. And I've been reading the Judge Dee books, a few of which I first encountered in high school.

As for the new, 2005 has been a good year for fiction—witness not only the bedside stacks but books heaped in my “study” nearby, and downstairs, and in every available place. The Albanian Ismail Kadare returns with another uncanny fable, *The Successor* (Arcade). Ignore the polemics about the degree of his complicity with the Hoxha regime. Read the book. If you like it, there are many more to look forward to. The perverse intelligence of the Spanish novelist Javier Marias is again on display in *Your Face Tomorrow* (New Directions), the first part of a two-part work called *Fever and Spear*. For audacity and imaginative reach, William T. Vollmann's *Europe Central* (Viking) may be the most impressive fiction of the year that I've seen, a massive volume of linked stories moving back and forth between Russia and Germany and centered largely on World War II.

T.C. Boyle's collection of stories, *Tooth and Claw* (Viking), shows that his hand has lost none of its cunning. He remains at his best in the short story. And speaking of stories, Michael Chabon edited this year's volume of *The Best American Short Stories* (Houghton Mifflin) and supplied an introduction. A new novel by Chabon is due in the spring of 2006. And then there is *The Dreams*, by the Egyptian Nobel Prize-winner Naguib Mahfouz (American University in Cairo). Each very brief "story" relates a dream. If you described the book to me, I would be sure to say that it sounded awful. In fact, I found it absorbing.

The fantastically prolific Alexander McCall Smith produced another charming chronicle of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, *In the Company of Cheerful Ladies* (Pantheon), and the second entry in The Sunday Philosophy Club, *Friends, Lovers, and Chocolate* (Pantheon), which is better than its dreadfully twee title might suggest. (McCall's third series is not my cup of tea.) I feared that *The Murder Room* might be Adam Dalgliesh's—and P. D. James'—last case. But James, now well into her eighties, has brought Dalgliesh back for another turn in *The Lighthouse* (Knopf). Likewise William F. Buckley Jr., with *Last Call for Blackford Oakes* (Harcourt). Both are of excellent vintage.

Among younger writers, I was glad to see Rebecca Pawel's *Watcher in the Pines* (Soho), the third entry in her series set in Spain during and after the Civil War. And among those new to me, I was struck particularly by Guillermo Martinez's *The Oxford Murders* (MacAdam/Cage). The author is a professor of mathematics in Argentina.

Notable reissues include a series of novels from Loyola Press, headed by Rumer Godden's *In This House of Brede*, and two Peter DeVries' titles: *The Blood of the Lamb* and *Slouching Toward Kalamazoo* (Chicago).

You may have been wondering about *Almonds to Zoo* (Triquarterly/Northwestern), which turns out to be the title of Richard Stern's collected stories. The protagonist of Stern's story "Packages"—who closely resembles the author himself—travels from Chicago to New York for his mother's memorial service.

An out-of-town friend has offered the use of his apartment. After the service, when the narrator returns to the apartment with the "package" of his mother's ashes, wrapped in brown paper, he notices the trash ready for collection lining the street. No one else is around. He leaves the package in a carton, goes to the door of the apartment, returns to the street and covers the package with a newspaper, heads to the apartment again, changes his mind again, and returns to the street yet again. He unwraps the package and tries to open the "silvery can," without success. He puts it back in the carton, covers it with newspaper again, and adds "a plastic sack of rinds and fish bones."

Much of the rest of this short story consists of memories of the protagonist's mother and father at the end of their lives, especially of his mother—his exasperation mingled with grudging affection. At the end, carries on a one-sided conversation with her:

Good-bye, darling.

And: why not?

You were a child of the city. Born here, your mother born here. If I could have pried it open, I would have spread you in Central Park. But this way is better than a drawer in that Westchester mausoleum. Foolish, garish anteroom to no house. Egyptian stupidity.

And it was the *practical* thing to do.

Wasn't it, Mother?

Richard Stern is a marvelous writer. His books have traveled with me on many moves, making the cut when others had to be left behind. But when I read this story again, for the first time since it appeared in a 1980 collection, I felt a chilling sadness. Anteroom to no house. So don't be a chump. Toss the can in the trash. Cover with a plastic sack of rinds and fish bones. Why not?

Is something more going on? Does the narrator protest too much, perhaps because he knows what he did was wrong? And at the end, he is talking to his mother. So one question leads to another, and the books of one year to the books of the next.

Or is it, as Kurzweil imagines, to next year's digital texts—and beyond texts, to our own transformation into pure information? For now we read through a monitor darkly, but one day we shall read face to face. FT

BOOKS IN REVIEW

Strange Spirits

RESTLESS SOULS: THE MAKING OF
AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY
by LEIGH ERIC SCHMIDT
*HarperSanFrancisco, 352 pages,
\$26.95*

Reviewed by Philip Jenkins

WHERE TWO OR THREE Americans are gathered, they will sooner or later discuss religion. In blue states and cities, the tone of the conversation normally resembles that of worried Londoners in 1665 mulling the public-health situation, and at least one of the party will draw a very familiar distinction: "I'm not reli-

gious, but I'm spiritual." Though the phrase is clichéd, you know pretty exactly what is meant. "Spiritual" in this context means a general interest in the metaphysical, a free-floating mysticism that abhors creeds, orthodoxies or rituals. It aims at spiritual enlightenment and progress, in harmony with all other races and cultures. The term implies a quest for the Higher Truths taught by all world religions but without the snares and diversions that fallible human beings have over the centuries introduced into those systems. Commonly, the spiritual person will graze across the broad pastures of the world's scriptures and devotional works, sampling a Christian scripture here, a poem of

Rumi there, perhaps with doses of Black Elk and Thich Nhat Hanh, the Gospel of Thomas and the Tibetan Book of the Dead. The Internet has vastly enhanced the resources available for modern seekers.

Americans commonly assume that such a mix-and-match cultural package is a recent development, a product of the mystical enthusiasm that succeeded the political obsessions of the late 1960s. And, indeed, "New Age" thought, as we know it today, con-

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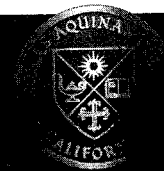
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gealed around 1980. Yet as Leigh Schmidt reminds us in his readable and highly informative recent book *Restless Souls*, the roots of this sort of "spirituality" go back much further in American history, at least to Emerson and the Transcendentalists—and perhaps all the way back to the Rosicrucians and alchemists who were in America decades before the Great Revival of the 1730s.

Nearly every remark Schmidt quotes sounds as though it could come from the modern "spiritual but not religious" crowd. As early as 1871, for instance, Thomas Wentworth Higginson declared that "I do not wish to belong to a religion only but to the religion; it must not include less than the piety of the world." In 1905, George Santayana wrote that "this aspiring side of religion may be called spirituality," making this the "higher side" of religion. Ralph

Waldo Trine assured his listeners that "There is no separation between your soul and the soul of the universe. In the deepest sense, you are the great universal soul. . . . Man is God incarnate." Schmidt is interesting on the history of the word "seeker," another Emersonian contribution, though one with roots in seventeenth-century England. Time and time again, we see that the "New" Age is anything but.

Restless Souls is a genuinely likeable and unfailingly sympathetic study of a series of movements and thinkers in the American spiritual tradition. The book disappoints slightly in its chronological coverage. Though promising a survey "from Emerson to Oprah," most of the material ranges from around 1840 to the 1930s, with not so many recent studies. (Schmidt is very good though on the evolving myth of the allegedly

colonial-era meditation found in *Desiderata*, actually the twentieth-century work of Max Ehrmann).

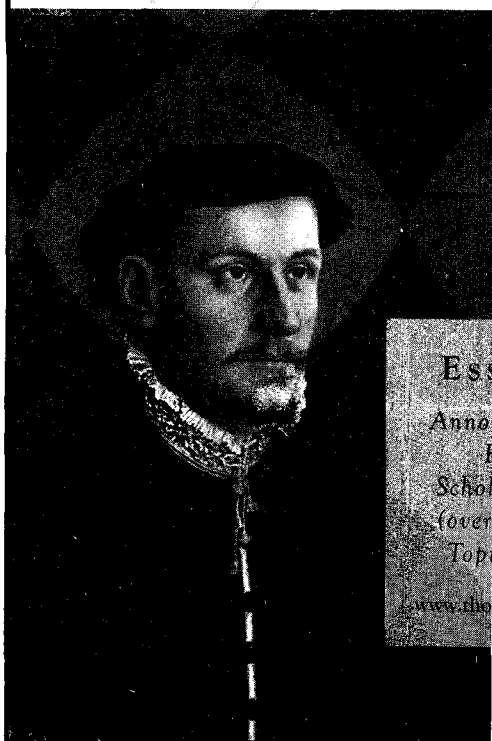
Still, Schmidt's *Restless Souls* demonstrates the importance of his subjects and their impact on critical social developments. The religious movements he discusses attracted the efforts of a great many women in these years, and throughout the story, we see the intimate alliance between the metaphysical group and social progressives or sexual reformers. The metaphysical groups also served as important conduits for foreign or innovative ideas into mainstream American culture. As the nineteenth century progressed, they were major vehicles for the growing influence of Asian religions, and they drew heavily on Hindu and Buddhist insights.

Also persistent were links with healing movements: Mesmerism, Christian Science, New Thought, and



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the trend commonly described as "Mind Cure," which denied the existence of objective reality. Among the sources of Mind Cure, William James offered a catalogue that serves equally well to describe the roots of the "spiritual" ideology. James specifically listed: "the four Gospels; another is Emersonianism or New England

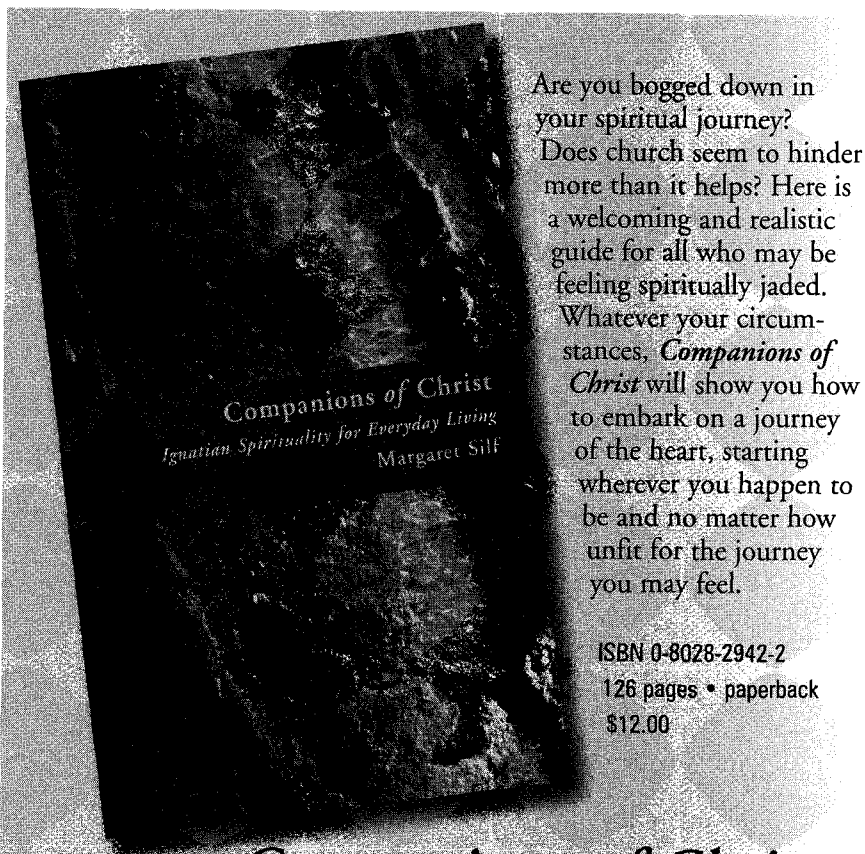
Transcendentalism; another is Berkeleyan idealism; another is spiritism, with its messages of 'law' and 'progress' and 'development'; another the optimistic popular science evolutionism . . . and finally, Hinduism has contributed a strain. . . . With its constant thought of prosperity, its opulent-consciousness, its belief in

the limitless possibilities of the individual, [it] is simply American psychology on dress parade."

Naturally enough, these ideas meshed easily enough with later psychologies and therapy movements. *Restless Souls* demonstrates yet again the thoroughly religious character of American culture, and reminds us that occult, mystical, and metaphysical doctrines are so strongly represented in our tradition that they can scarcely be labeled "fringe" beliefs. Rather, we should see them as a third tradition, as much part of the inheritance as evangelical Protestantism and Catholicism.

Schmidt sees the spiritual tradition in highly positive terms, and argues strongly for its contemporary relevance. Following writers such as Jim Wallis, he argues that liberal and radical Americans should not fear to use religious thought and rhetoric, but should proudly claim their basic American inheritance. For Wallis, this means the prophetic and radical voices of evangelicalism, while for Schmidt, it means mystical or spiritual religion. *Restless Souls* is thus "a call to recover the spiritual resources of the liberal tradition." The "new spirituality," he writes, "is old and not other. The Spiritual Left goes deep into the grain of American culture; it is here for the long haul." For all its failings and errors, it contributes mightily to "the incomplete labor of democratic freedom and cosmopolitan progressivism." Modern heirs of the "spiritual" include "affiliated and unaffiliated seekers, mainline Protestants, Reform Jews, liberal Catholics, Quakers, Unitarians, Vedantists, Bahai's, spiritually minded feminists, members of meditation centers, social activists, tamed cynics and intractable progressives."

Unfortunately, the political impact of such a mobilization would be limited, given that few of these constituencies can really be described as non-aligned, or as anything other than true-blue Democrats. And I fear



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that Schmidt's characterization of the Spiritual Left is also excessively rosy, largely due to the limits of his study. He is focusing on thinkers rather than mass audiences—and on these writers and activists only as they contributed to the metaphysical and spiritual movement. He does not therefore explore the many groups that drew on the same traditions but mingled them with far less palatable occult ideas. When seeking the roots of "spirituality," we could just as easily look to someone like Charles Fillmore, whose popularizing magazine *Modern Thought* in the 1880s offered articles on "spiritualism, Unitarianism, Rosicrucianism, transcendentalism, Christian Science and New Thought." At least from the mid-nineteenth century on, spirituality was the stock in trade of countless cults and groups claiming to offer the essence of spirituality to gullible mass publics, commonly with their particular leader or guru as supreme prophet, seer, and revelator.

In practice, it is nearly impossible to draw a clear line between the austere thought-world of Schmidt's "Spiritual Left" and the freewheeling esoteric subculture of lost continents, telepathy, numerology, Rosicrucianism, and the Great Pyramid, not to mention cult communes and compounds. These, I submit, are lineal heirs of the Emersonians, quite as evidently as the ethical splendors of a Howard Thurman. From Schmidt's exalted account of the elegant world of Progressive-era spiritual thinkers, we would scarcely imagine the mass industry in esoteric and metaphysical ideas from about 1915 on. This marketing boom reached its height in the interwar years with such charter members of the spiritual-industrial complex as Psychiana, MIGHTY I AM, the Silver Shirts of William Dudley Pelley, and a dozen mail-order cults dispensing the wisdom of the ages. As Charles W. Ferguson wearily remarked in the 1920s, "It should be obvious to any man who is

not one himself that the land is overrun with messiahs." When one decides to embark on a voyage of spiritual seeking, the journey has no clear destination.

EQUALLY, I WONDER about the progressive and democratic implications of the term "Spiritual Left." America's esoteric and metaphysical movements have often demonstrated strongly authoritarian currents, which have been further reinforced by the Asian notion of the guru and the teacher-pupil relationship. By the 1930s, many of the American esoteric and occult movements were rampantly pro-fascist. We see a worrying parallel to this in the European Traditionalist movements recently described in Mark Sedgwick's brilliant 2004 book *Against the Modern World*. For these Europeans, religious "liberalism" began with an enlightened and Europeanized version of Sufi Islam, that served much the same role that Hinduism did for the Transcendentalists. But Traditionalists, too, often ended up flirting with fascism. Personally, if I was looking for the religious roots of America's liberal tradition, I would look more to the Protestant Biblical and prophetic tradition and to Catholic theories of social justice.

Another less-than-desirable feature of the "Spiritual Left" is its endemic elitism and contempt for the ordinary religion of the masses. If spirituality is the "higher side" of religion, what then is the "lower side"? Presumably, anything that involves faith, dogma, ritual, and more or less what the common folk in the pews do. A current of elitism can also be traced to the exaltation of wilderness, and the consequent loathing of cities, modernity, and mass civilization—in short, of people. When reading the section of *Restless Souls* on hermitism, I inevitably thought of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, an environmentalist bible but also an alarming plea for the reduction of

human population by whatever means might be necessary.

In short, Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Restless Souls* does a valuable service in placing the metaphysical tradition firmly where it belongs in the story of American religious thought. Ideas like those presented in the book are indeed "old and not other," and they reflect the mental worlds of many Americans. Churches need an apologetic to counter the "spiritual" arguments, to show just exactly why religion is not an inferior or tainted form of human behavior. Above all, they need to show "seekers" that virtually everything they are seeking can in fact be found within the cultural resources of Christianity—and that includes such heady concepts as union with the divine. As the phrase should read, "I'm religious, and that includes spiritual."

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Persons and Rights

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?
PERSONALISM AND THE
FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS
 by THOMAS D. WILLIAMS
The Catholic University of America
Press, 342 pages, \$69.95

Reviewed by Russell Hittinger

WHEN THE CHRISTIAN churches incorporated "human rights" as a philosophy and project, did they take on an ethic that corrupts their best moral thinking drawn from scripture and classical humanism? Skeptics inclined to this subversive thought have pointed to a range of issues.

The modern philosophies of natural rights, for instance, evolved in

RUSSELL HITTINGER is Warren Professor of Catholic Studies and Research Professor of Law at the University of Tulsa.

tandem with the problems they claimed to solve: the reduction of the human person to the status of an individual proprietor of powers and things; the myth of social and political orders as constructs of commutative justice; the rejection, or, in any case, the despair in locating natural or supernatural foundations for moral consensus; and the creation of state sovereignty that brings in train claims of natural rights as so many immunities against untrammelled state power. One theologian has put the issue neatly: "the question that has yet to be satisfactorily answered . . . is why Christian thinkers have been and are willing to adopt a child of such questionable parentage as the concept of human rights."

Then again, it is claimed, the notion of human rights is subversive of the institutions of justice and the rule of law, whatever its historical

and ideological lineage. Even when their content seems morally unobjectionable, human rights are often vague and leave the scope of individual and social responsibility so blurry that we cannot know with any precision who owes what to whom—or, on another model, they are enumerated in such detail that they look more like social legislation than natural rights.

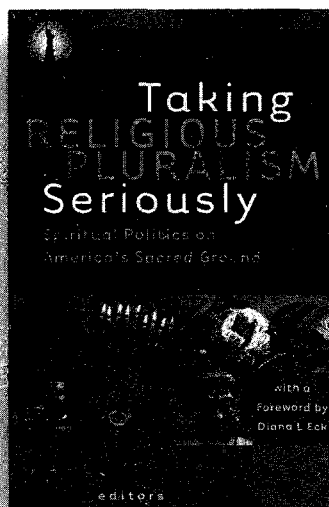
Finally, these critics argue, the discourse of human rights not only leaves ontological foundations floating somewhere in air but marginalizes the moral and supernatural virtues that are necessary to keep justice from becoming abstract and infelicitous. It obscures the conversions of mind and heart, and desiccates the moral imagination necessary for treating one's neighbor rightly.

A moderate supporter of human rights might answer that the crimes

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of the last century made necessary some accommodation of public rhetoric about human rights, at least for any institution wishing to speak credibly in the public sphere. Such a supporter might concede that talk of human rights leaves philosophical groundings unclear and practical details underdetermined—yet insist that discourse about human rights can be a useful way to summon minds to some of the tasks of justice. Human rights, in this view, is a secondary language, useful for the communication rather than the location of moral truths upon which justice depends.

But Thomas Williams, dean of theology at the Regina Apostolorum Pontifical University in Rome, seeks something more than moderate support for human rights. In his new book *Who Is My Neighbor?*, Williams maintains that “sensible ideas can sometimes arise from contaminated philosophies.” Once decontaminated—which is to say, once we understand human rights according to an adequate ontology of the human person—rights turn out to be neither alien nor secondary as a language for locating moral truth. Rather than being coyly accommodated, human rights are to be embraced. Indeed, they ought to be made even more prominent in Christian ethics and social doctrine, because they are integral to natural law and to the gospel imperative to love one’s neighbor.

The hinge for Williams is Karol Wojtyła’s thesis that “a person’s rightful due is to be treated as an object of love.” “In fact,” he continues, “the order of justice is more fundamental than the order of love... inasmuch as love can be a requirement of justice.” Williams explains the relation between love and justice according to St. Thomas Aquinas’ distinction between love of desire (*amor concupiscentiae*) and love of friendship (*amor amicitiae*).

An agent, Thomas holds, does

every action from love of some kind, for love is a principle of movement toward an end. In the case of other persons, the love of goods for one’s own sake is distorted or incomplete without the love of the other person for his own sake. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” as the Gospel of Matthew puts it. To understand what is a human person is to understand, however imperfectly, that the proper due is love—and to grasp this much is to understand, albeit imperfectly, that we must will for our neighbors things that are truly good for the neighbor’s own sake. Rights arise not from subjective claims, but rather from the good of human subjects.

Love is not reducible to justice, for love aims at union with the person as such; it transcends particular things exchanged. In this sense love is a movement toward completion and is

called the “end” of the commandments. As Thomas explains, the commandment is fulfilled in three ways: It is “holy” if fulfilled for God’s sake, “righteous” if one wills for his neighbor only truly good things, and “true” if the neighbor is loved for his own sake, as one loves oneself. The greatest completion is found in the first way of fulfilling the commandment, but Williams correctly notes that the third way most properly signifies the scope of the precept in the sphere of justice.

At the same time, true love—loving one’s neighbor for himself, as one loves oneself—discloses the interdependence of love and justice in its most familiar terms. Doing good to another presupposes love of the other’s good. What is loveable about the neighbor magnetizes the motion of love and traces out the requirements of justice (strict duties as well

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as the more open-ended responsibilities to care for and promote the good of the neighbor).

Justice pertains to the particular goods relating, belonging, or being due to the other person, for the neighbor's own good. "Thus just as the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself reveals the implicit dignity of the human person and his intrinsic 'loveableness,'" Williams writes, "so the specifications of the commandment to love, such as the injunctions of the second tablet of the Decalogue, reveal particulars of that dignity—which are natural human rights." In this sense, love is a "primordial ur-right." It is, at once, the basis and the end of justice to neighbor. Williams insists that "if love is not owed to the person," the "bottom falls out of any attempt to make sense of natural human rights and duties."



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Without it, natural rights become carelessly claimed and carelessly ignored. They will look like self-assertions or political programs of the moment, floating free of the society uniting persons who are givers and recipients. Love that manifests itself in justice is good for both giver and recipient. Williams writes: "If a person fails to develop his natural gifts for art or for mathematics, that is sad. If he never learns to love, he has failed in the essential enterprise for which he was created."

Williams sets all this out lucidly. He helps us to understand why Wojtyla and his generation of Catholic thinkers believed they were doing something more than merely accommodating the ethical idiom of natural rights. The effort to find an adequate anthropology, which occupies a considerable part of Williams' book, is the work of Thomistic personalism, after the fashion of Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, Gabriel Marcel, but especially Karol Wojtyla.

Broadly stated, Thomistic personalism uses St. Thomas Aquinas' objective anthropology and metaphysics as a "point of departure and permanent reference point" for inquiring into the nature of human self-consciousness. Such inquiry proceeds from the inside out, from the experiential phenomena of the acting person who knows, loves, and exercises mastery over his own acts. The method is meant to describe and affirm the subjective side of what has dignity and therefore rights. Williams emphasizes, along with Wojtyla, that this exercise stands or falls on the issue of subjectivism (subjectivity either made absolute or put into a permanent state of deferral with regard to the order of nature and metaphysics). If it is successful, the personalist method yields an account of the human subject as the bearer of dignities that satisfies contemporary interest in *subjectivity* (what Mounier

called "the perspectives of personal life") without becoming ensnared in *subjectivism*, the graveyard of human rights.

Inasmuch as the analysis of subjectivity targets the experience of the person as an agent, and then generates a system of objective value and right, the project sounds rather Kantian. Indeed, its persistent division of things into those having instrumental value and those which possess intrinsic value is Kantian. Its proponents, however, contend that personalism need not depict the human person as a kind of independent value, stranded from the rest of the world and linked to it perhaps only through the bridge-work of mental intentions.

For his part, Williams affirms the traditional ontology of potency-act, soul-body unity, natural sociability, and the classical understanding of the virtues. One wonders whether personalism avoids the pitfalls and obscurities just to the extent that it grafts itself on to a more classical philosophy—specifically to the Thomism that it set out to "improve." Williams, for example, begins with the binary division of persons having intrinsic value in contrast to the rest of the world, but when he moves into the constructive chapters of the book, on the relation between love and justice, the two-term Kantian division is translated into a much richer picture of intelligible goods and appetites and diverse modes of love and friendship. It is as though a switch were flipped, and the phenomena begin to acquire the dimensions of a living world. Phenomena acquire names, definitions are drawn, and distinctions multiply as the plot thickens.

For personalists of the strict persuasion, this is not supposed to happen. Williams remarks that "the great value of personalistic thought is that, in a sense, it picks up where Thomas leaves off." The question cannot be settled here, but it seems the order of Williams' own inquiry and exposition shows the opposite to be true.

The Literary Bible

**NORTHROP FRYE: RELIGIOUS
VISIONARY AND ARCHITECT OF
THE SPIRITUAL WORLD**
by ROBERT D. DENHAM
University of Virginia Press,
373 pages, \$37.50

Reviewed by M.D. Aeschliman

NORTHROP FRYE WAS one of the half-dozen most influential literary critics of the twentieth century, and his wide-ranging mind brought him unusual prominence in the study and interpretation of comparative religion and mythology. Born in Canada in 1912, he was associated for his whole career with the University of Toronto, first as a student and then as a professor and administrator until his death in 1991.

The University of Toronto Press has thus far issued fourteen volumes (out of a projected thirty-four) in the complete edition of Frye's works, and most of these volumes have been edited by the American scholar Robert D. Denham. Now, with *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World*, Denham has drawn on the private notebooks and letters he edited for the Toronto edition in an interesting and judicious study of Frye's thought.

The publication in 1947 of Frye's landmark study of William Blake, *Fearful Symmetry*, was followed in 1957 by his systematic treatise *The Anatomy of Criticism*. These two books earned Frye an esteem among humanistic intellectuals that was increased by his subsequent works, especially on Romanticism. By the 1960s he had become one of the most influential non-scientific intellectuals in the world, with a scope of influ-

M.D. AESCHLIMAN is professor of Education at Boston University, adjunct professor of English at the University of Italian Switzerland, and author of *The Restitution of Man: C.S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism*.

ence among students, teachers, and scholars of literature equaled or exceeded only by T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis, and perhaps Lionel Trilling.

Unlike Eliot and Lewis, Frye was not himself a writer of imaginative literature, but like them, he had strong, systematic philosophical and religious interests and views. In addition, Frye started out his studies at Toronto in theology, was ordained upon graduation, and remained for fifty-five years a minister in the Protestant United Church of Canada. Frye's religious interests and views were reflected in all of his writing, but especially in the last three books he wrote—*The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1982), *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of "The Bible and Literature"* (1990), and *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion* (1991).

In the 1960s and 1970s Frye was so influential and authoritative that he became something of a cult figure among critics and students. But his complex approach always had detractors, as well. Conservative Christian thinkers were suspicious of his use of the word "myth" to include Christian scripture and doctrine—and also of his apparent similarity to Joseph Campbell and the off-beat, countercultural, utopian radicals of those days, many of whom claimed to have been inspired by Blake, and sometimes by Frye himself.

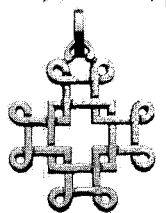
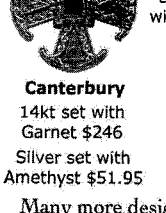
Then, in the early 1980s, heavy artillery was brought against Frye from the opposite end of the spectrum, the cultural Left, led by figures such as Jonathan Culler and Terry Eagleton. While Eliot and Lewis could be written off by secular-minded critics as obviously partisan theological writers and critics, Frye's position was harder to attack, and his writing harder to ignore. His work had a systematic, encyclopedic, professional character (especially *The Anatomy of Criticism*), and it

showed an ecumenical, syncretic generosity toward many literary traditions and works. Then too, like most critics on the British and American Left, Frye had opposed the neoclassicist and neotraditionalist assaults on Romantic literature—as "spilt religion"—that had been led by T.E. Hulme, Irving Babbitt, P.E. More, Eliot, Ezra Pound, Allen Tate, and Yvor Winters.

Still, from the outset in his great book on Blake, Frye's devotion to the Romantic imaginative tradition had different premises than that of most liberals and radicals. Two years of graduate study in Oxford in the late 1930s impressed upon him the ersatz religious—in some ways Romantic—character of Nazism and Fascism (which Denis de Rougemont called "a politics of collective Romanticism"). Ten years in produc-



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tion, Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* (1947) was written during World War II and was deeply affected by these hysterical, mythological ideologies and their apocalyptic effects.

Decades later he was to write that from the German Romantic poet Hölderlin onwards, "in proportion as the God of Christianity began to

look metaphorical, the metaphorical gods began to look like objects of worship again"—Odin, Thor, and Wotan, the gods of war, blood, soil, and amoral will to power, were resurrected, a point made with terrifying prescience in 1834 by Heinrich Heine. A perverse current of defiant, atheistic, "heroic vitalism"—of

Promethean self-divinization—ran from Byron and Shelley, through Carlyle, Emerson, Wagner, and Nietzsche, and down to Hitler. "The Führer's state," Goebbels said in Danzig in 1939, "is the product of an imagination of genius."

Frye's loyalty to the Romantic tradition was to its most strongly Protestant figures: Blake and Coleridge, and behind them, Milton as a Christian revolutionary, republican, and visionary. As Denham's book makes clear, Frye was also an astute and lifelong reader of Hegel, whose *Phenomenology of Spirit* was a seminal book for him. The Blake-Coleridge doctrine of "imagination" seemed to Frye superior not only to neoclassical ideas of reason, imitation, and formal control, but also to the ascendant scientific rationalism-reductionism of the French Enlightenment.

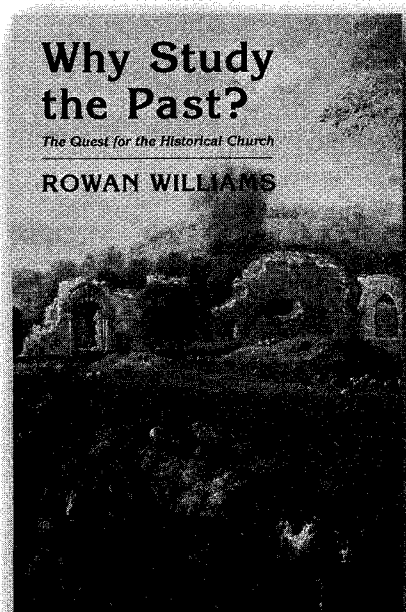
Blake believed this reductionism had already been present in the great proto-Enlightenment English thinkers Bacon, Newton, and Locke: "May God us keep / From single vision and Newton's sleep," he wrote in 1802. Like later thinkers as diverse as R.G. Collingwood, C.S. Lewis, Jacques Barzun, and Lionel Trilling, Frye saw Romanticism generally as a powerful and necessary response to the reductionism implicit in the French *philosophes'* program, with its ultimately dehumanizing assimilation of the human person to nature. In a notebook from the last decade of his life, Frye wrote: "Hell is human life as 'mere nature,' as Blake says; purgatory is the effort of the spirit to emerge from this."

Frye's notebooks record an epiphany in the summer of 1951 that encouraged him to continue to resist what he thought of as the inevitable product of "single vision"—the abyss of modern alienation, absurdity, and anxiety. The "double vision" he wanted was the Christianity of Milton, Blake, and Coleridge: a radical rejection of scientific, naturalistic,

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and positivistic monism. In this insistence Frye resembles contemporary philosophical Christian poets and critics such as Czeslaw Milosz, Geoffrey Hill, and Wendell Berry. Along the way, Frye was willing to search for allies and resources in Eastern religions and even New Age spirituality, to oppose what he once called "progressive, numerical, self-hypnotic scientism."

Frye came to believe that the concept of the "Logos," from the pre-Socratics to St. John's Gospel, was the key intersection in history of the divine and human and that it was at the heart of human sanity and creativity. His theo-poetics was rooted in the Bible, Plato, Dante, Spenser, Milton, Blake, Coleridge, and Hegel. Deeply suspicious of the sufficiency of propositional language, he employed religious language as the only adequate vehicle for the most important features of human creativity: prophecy, *kerygma*, incarnation, apocalypse, charity, resurrection.

There was no evasion or obfuscation in Frye, despite the occasional charge that he was "an idealizing and escapist visionary." Generously open to all sorts of literary art as well as to novel, off-beat, consciousness-expanding literature ("kook books," he called them), Frye's own analytical and expository discourse was normative, realist, and anti-nominalist. Though the structure of Frye's analysis can be breathtakingly vast and elaborate, and the allusiveness nearly overwhelming, there is an underlying modesty of diction.

Much inspired by Frye, the volatile Romantic and gnostic critic Harold Bloom was unhappy with the mature consolidation of Frye's religious vision. He complained that in Frye's last book, the posthumously published *Double Vision*, Frye insisted that "it would be absurd to see the New Testament as only a work of literature." But this insistence was nothing new. Readers of

Denham's book will see how continuously important Frye's faith was both to his life and to his work. His critical imagination had always been animated by a radical Protestant vision of logos and charity, and by devotion to a tradition of social gospel Christianity that stretched

from his own Methodism through Christian Socialism, Blake, Bunyan, Milton, Langland, and St. Francis, and back to the Scriptures themselves.

Whether Frye's magisterial systematization of literature will survive the attack or neglect of current liter-

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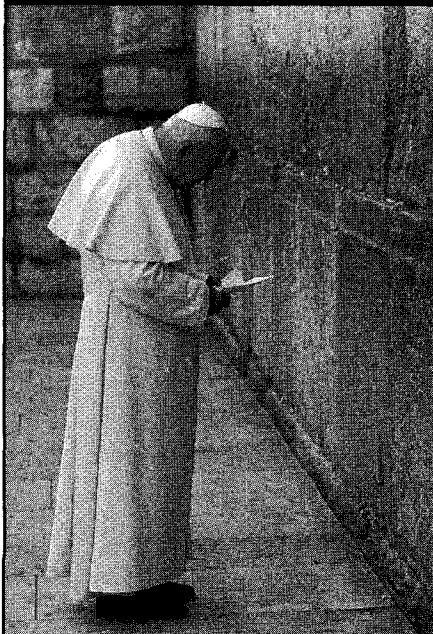
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ary critics is uncertain. Conservative Protestants and Catholics may still hold him in suspicion—perhaps because they lack the tradition of high literacy that Frye worked so hard to safeguard and convey. As for worries about the orthodoxy of Frye's encyclopedic, prophetic, liter-

ary-religious vision, we might remember Moses' rebuke to those who would have had him silence the unauthorized prophets Eldad and Medad: "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would pour his spirit upon them!"

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Who Would True Valour See?

**JOHN BROWN—ABOLITIONIST: THE
MAN WHO KILLED SLAVERY,
SPARKED THE CIVIL WAR, AND
SEEDED CIVIL RIGHTS**
by DAVID S. REYNOLDS
Knopf, 592 pages, \$35

Reviewed by Wesley J. Smith

THE VIOLENT abolitionist John Brown, whose assault on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry in 1859 helped spark the Civil War, has been called many things: savior and monster, saint and murderer, visionary and fanatic. And the interesting thing is that all of them are true. As depicted in David S. Reynolds' meticulously researched and eloquently written new biography, *John Brown—Abolitionist*, he was a man who sincerely believed, rightly or wrongly, that the only way to destroy the evil of American slavery was through bloodshed. One wonders whether the slaughter of the Civil War proves he was right—or did his actions help cause the war and thereby make violence the only solution?

Most Americans know how the story ended, with Brown captured by federal troops under the command of the young Robert E. Lee and hanged for murder and treason. Less familiar is Brown's pre-Harper's Ferry life as a family patriarch, lay preacher, failed tanner and land speculator, abolitionist agitator, promoter of racial and sexual equality, and terrorist in the mini-civil war known as "Bloody Kansas"—all of which Brown engaged in with indomitable gusto.

One cannot understand John Brown without comprehending the power of religious belief to drive, for

WESLEY J. SMITH is a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute and a special consultant to the Center for Bioethics and Culture. He is currently researching a book on the animal-liberation movement.

good and ill, the course of human affairs. Indeed, few figures in history have in one life demonstrated both the transcendent possibility of faith to lift the believer's consciousness to the heights of human benevolence, and its potential to mutate into a dangerous utopianism in which one arrogantly presumes to act as the right arm of God. Reynolds admirably lays out this paradox of Brown's life, expressing tremendous admiration bordering on love for the man, while generally not glossing over the terrible wrongs he committed.

Brown was a through-and-through Calvinist who embraced his faith literally and wholeheartedly. He saw himself as a Puritan and patterned his life after that Puritan deposer of kings, Oliver Cromwell. His belief in predestination bolstered his often difficult life with a stoic spirit that permitted him to accept with true thanksgiving poverty, repeated business failures, physical hardships, the deaths of several children, including two sons at Harper's Ferry, and his own hanging as the expression of God's will. It also allowed him to commit heinous murders.

Brown believed wholeheartedly Paul's words in Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are one in Christ Jesus." He lived these beliefs by making his home in North Elba, New York, among a community of freed bondsmen, where he assisted with the Underground Railroad. He advocated not just an end to slavery, but full inclusion of blacks into society, including the rights to vote, work, and be educated. He was willing to die—as he did—to help blacks achieve these ends. No wonder, as Reynolds notes, Brown remains a revered figure among African-Americans to this day.

But it is not until "Bloody Kansas," three years before Harper's Ferry, that Brown fully enters the drama of American history. There is an aston-

ishing mural, in Kansas' state capitol building, showing an enraged Brown in all his prophet-bearded glory, holding a Bible in one outstretched hand and a rifle in the other (with tornadoes portentously in the background), as he leads in the effort to make Kansas free. With the exception of the beard—Brown was clean-shaven in Kansas—there is more truth than legend in this depiction.

Prior to Kansas, Brown had never hurt anyone. But in the 1850s, the slave powers began to gain political ground. With the 1854 passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Missouri Compromise, which had kept the free and slave states in rough political parity, was dissolved. From now on "popular sovereignty," rather than geography, would decide whether a territory would be admitted into the Union "slave" or "free."

Popular sovereignty proved the doom of slavery. Most notably, the

real potential that slavery would now spread throughout the West, and perhaps even back into the North, enraged Abraham Lincoln and wrenched him out of a discouraged political retirement. It also convinced John Brown that the time for "talk, talk, talk," had passed. When Lawrence, Kansas was sacked by marauding proslavery ruffians and the great abolitionist senator Charles Sumner was nearly caned to death in the Senate chamber by a slavery-defending congressman, Brown's last vestige of restraint shattered.

WANTING TO FIGHT violence with violence, Brown led a small band of family members and friends to Kansas, intent on joining the fray. As Reynolds tells the story, Brown often acted righteously and heroically in Kansas, standing up to the ruffian raiders while badly outnumbered, and as the Kansas strife came to an



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end, even liberating slaves from Missouri and escorting them to freedom in Canada. Yet, when chance left a pro-slavery preacher who had murdered Brown's son entirely within his grasp, he showed remarkable restraint by refusing to take a life for a life, explaining to his followers, "People mistake my objects. I would not hurt one hair of his head. I would not go one inch to take his life; I do not harbor the feelings of revenge. I act from a principle. My aim and object is to restore human rights."

But though Brown's deportment in Kansas was at times admirable, it is overshadowed by the slaughter of Pottawatomie—the town where, in the stealth of night, Brown's band dragged five pro-slavery men out of their beds and hacked them to pieces. Reynolds is a devoted booster of Brown's place in history, but he does

not excuse or gloss over the terrible acts of Pottawatomie. Indeed, reading the graphic depiction of the murders brought Charles Manson powerfully to mind. Like Manson, Brown did not personally wield the swords. But his powerful cult-leader personality easily persuaded his weak-willed followers to commit cold-blooded murders.

After Pottawatomie, Brown was a wanted man. But his general valor in Kansas had also made him an admired figure to the radical abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass, who helped make Brown a star of the movement. Having literally gotten away with murder, Brown toured New England railing against slavery as he raised money and arms for the further defense of freedom in Kansas. But Brown knew that the Kansas struggle was winding down, with

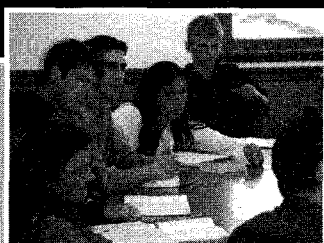
freedom already won. As he spoke of Kansas, he was really planning the invasion of Harper's Ferry.

Harper's Ferry was supposed to be a quick hit-and-run operation. Brown's plan was to strike the federal armory, steal weapons, and head for the nearby hills to fight an extended guerrilla war that would slowly work its way south, freeing slaves. Naively, Brown expected the South to quickly see that their cause was hopeless and free the slaves with little bloodshed.

But that fateful night, no one flocked to Brown's side and the beloved mayor of Harper's Ferry, who had always been kind to blacks, was senselessly shot and killed, creating a frenzy of rage in the town. Rather than escape to fight another day as originally planned, Brown was apparently discouraged by his failure to ignite a slave revolt, and he hun-

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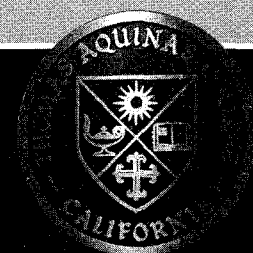
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kered down for a siege in the town. Eventually, a squad of federal troops (led by the future Confederate general J.E.B. Stuart, under the command of Robert E. Lee) ended the siege.

The failed invasion sparked a media frenzy. Newspapers and magazines from both North and South breathlessly printed every word Brown uttered and wrote. Understanding a great advocacy opportunity when he saw it, Brown spent the remaining weeks of his life eloquently condemning slavery and gaining the admiration of even his harshest critics through his personal courage and stoic acceptance of his fate. Brown's powerful speech at his death sentencing moved the North, and enraged the South: "I did no wrong, but right. Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of millions of slaves in this country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done."

Still, Reynolds writes, Brown would probably have been an asterisk in history had the cultural icons of transcendentalism not powerfully influenced Northern public opinion in his favor. Brown had met Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson while on his speaking tour of New England. Now the transcendentalists rallied to his defense as a living demonstration of their belief in the power of the individual to make positive change. Then, after he was hanged, they transformed Brown from someone perceived in the North as a madman into a Christ-like martyr and a rallying icon.

Brown's influence was increased too by the pro-slavery Democrats, who tried to hang his crimes like a millstone around the necks of their political nemeses, the Republicans. Ironically, the primary political victim of John Brown's raid turned out to be the cautious anti-slavery governor of New York, William Henry

Seward, whose earlier warning of a coming "irrepressible conflict" now made him appear too radical to be nominated for president. To fill the resulting political vacuum, Abraham Lincoln quickly rushed.

While Reynolds occasionally stretches Brown's influence past the breaking point, most of what he writes rings true. He also provides interesting support for his theory that John Wilkes Booth saw himself as a John Brown of the South when he walked through the doors of Ford's Theater on Good Friday night, 1865. Still, Reynolds can be irritating. For example, the author is so taken by Brown's visionary egalitarianism that he dismisses the contributions of far greater abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, with unfair criticism or faint praise.

He also seems too defensive when striving to convince the reader that Brown was no Osama Bin Laden. Moreover, at the book's end, Reynolds inexplicably takes a discordant anti-American tack, warning, "Unless America is ready at every moment to see its own failings, it is one step closer to becoming the tyrannical monster it pretends not to be." Further, he moans, "America has become a vast network of institutions that tend to stifle vigorous challenges from individuals"—as if reformers ever had it easy. But this, too, widely misses the mark. Social activism is diverse and robust today throughout the United States in support of causes great and small, and certainly more generally honored than at any other time in American history.

Still, *John Brown—Abolitionist* is a superb biography that brilliantly reanimates its larger-than-life subject in all his charisma and zealotry. Reynolds rightly admires Brown for living his faith and dying bravely for a woefully oppressed people. But for all the good he attempted to do, John Brown is no role model. His presumption of the duty to kill in a just cause has no place in modern society.

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THE PRESERVATIONIST
by DAVID MAINE
St. Martin's, 240 pages, \$21.95

Reviewed by Gregory Feeley

SCRIPTURE MAY CALL for exegesis, but literature requires interpretation. This makes fiction based upon Scripture peculiarly problematic, at least for those who regard the work's underlying source as more than mere raw material: Is the novel, play, movie to be judged to some degree in accordance with its piety? While

GREGORY FEELEY writes fiction and criticism. His most recent novel is *Arabian Wine*.

orthodoxy gains it no points—there are pious retellings of Bible stories that no one cares to reread—might apostasy cost it? The novel is a form notoriously unconcerned with fidelity to its sources; nobody praises Flaubert's "Herodias" or Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers* for their fidelity to the scriptural accounts they are based upon, and the varying revisionist dramatizations of most later writers—the list includes Nikos Kazantzakis, Michel Tournier, Joseph Heller, and Norman Mailer—assert their artistic freedom like rebellious sons.

The story of Noah is probably the most famous in the Bible; young children who know nothing of Creation or the Fall will readily recognize the tale of the ark and its animals. Kipling dramatized aspects of it in both prose and verse, and modern versions include a folk song, many

famous cartoons, a Broadway musical, a Bill Cosby sketch, and modern novels by such writers as Julian Barnes and Timothy Findley—and now David Maine, whose first novel, last year's *The Preservationist*, took up the story one more time. A spare, dispassionate narrative that abjures overt irony and stylistic flair, Maine's forty-two mostly brief chapters recount the events of Genesis 6-9 from the viewpoint of the ark's eight passengers, with testimony in turn from each family member save Noah himself, whose account is rendered in the third person.

Minor episodes are added to explain details upon which Scripture is silent—the sons' wives are sent to distant lands to gather pairs of animals, and it is the giants, mentioned briefly before Noah appears, who provide the timber for the Ark—but nothing in the account is altered.

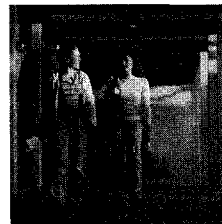


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Nobody reads Scripture for those qualities peculiar to prose fiction, such as the delineation of shifting states of consciousness, or the half-aware colloquies that the mind engages with itself. Such moments, nonetheless, appear—implicit though undramatized—throughout the Old Testament, and the story of Noah has at least two: Noah's own never-expressed response to the Lord's commission, and the late scene when Shem discloses Noah's drunken stupor to his brothers, who engage in a tortuous maneuver to cover their father's nakedness (which only alerts him upon waking to what has happened). Surprisingly, Maine makes little of these scenes: Noe (the author uses the spellings employed in a pre-King James translation) is portrayed in the opening sentence as glancing "toward the heavens, something he does a lot these days," but aside from the implication that he may be looking for further divine clarification and not just the promised rains, we don't see him musing much. Yahweh abruptly speaks, and Noe knows enough to follow his orders (and compel his family to do the same) without wondering at greater meanings. Only at the novel's end—with his children scattered, his God fallen again silent, and the curse upon his son Cham's child to ponder—does Noe engage in something like introspection.

The personality of Noe may largely conform to the Old Testament's abjurement of what Harold Bloom calls "inwardness," but other aspects of the novel only seem to emulate its source. Maine gives the three sons' wives names, but Noe's wife remains simply "The Wife." His decision to treat her unnamed condition as essential and theirs as provisional is not an attempt to draw something from Scripture (they are never cited by Genesis except together), but to create an effect specific to his novel: that the sons (and even more so their wives, who were not raised by Noe)

are in varying respects more "modern" than he is. It's a good tactic, but it belongs to Maine, not the Bible.

The novel proves unscriptural in other ways, particularly in its language. When Maine describes Noe's ordeal in traveling through a desert by saying, "Around him the land quivers and ripples as if still just an idea in God's mind," he is making a decision to admit the Platonic image rather than impoverish the range of language available to him. A hundred pages later, Noe bears the physical ordeal of life in the Ark "stoically." The implicit anachronism recurs, but what better word is there? Once admitted, this principle can be taken to some lengths: When Japheth deals with stress by running the length of the Ark, he is described as "blowing off steam."

In the end, *The Preservationist* does not follow Scripture but, rather, its own rules (one of which is: Don't contradict Scripture on an explicit

point). Sentiments that are incongruous with the second century B.C. are proposed—usually by the brothers' wives—without being explicitly endorsed. Tidy symmetries and dramatic counterpoints inform the book's structure, giving it something of the texture of a fable (which is also out of keeping with Genesis). Maine's eloquent and vivid novel is finally about its own business, not Scripture's, but the two are scarcely extricable, and we read in part to see how, and how successfully, the strong-willed son will pull away.

Now with the new *Fallen*, Maine's second novel, the novelist's prerogative to transform his material is yet more firmly affirmed. Maine's account of the first two generations of humanity is told in reverse, beginning with a chapter (numbered "40") that portrays Cain as a dying old man and then marching backward, with the chapter headings counting down, to the moment following the expul-



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sion from the Garden. Formal strictures abound. The novel, for instance, is divided into four books of ten chapters, each of which concludes with a one-page chapter and each of which contains a chapter entitled "The Old Man."

Maine's language in *Fallen* is even less bound to the illusion of historical verisimilitude than it was in *The Preservationist*: Eve likens the memory of the Garden to "the remembered scent of a lover," a changed object is said to "morph," and the narrator likens Cain's mark to a "Tower of Babel reflected mirror-wise" that everyone sees differently. Dramatizing the trauma of expulsion from Paradise, Maine sometimes employs the cadences of the Old Testament ("The sun rises and sets and does not change") and sometimes the concise, allusive conjunction of high and low that characterizes modern prose (as in the Babel image, or when Eve reflects on their vicissitudes "ever

since their departure from the Garden to fight their way through this deathtrap called Creation"). And the bitten single word of his title compels you to ponder to whom it refers, as *The Preservationist* does not.

Confident of his reader's familiarity with the calamity of the Fall and the story of Cain, Maine arranges their elements into quadrants presented in inverted order: a dolorous meal of successive missteps where one has to swallow the consequences first. The effect is surprisingly disconcerting. Something bad happens, but it is never mentioned in the subsequent chapters, which heedlessly prepare its coming about. Only in the novel's final section does Maine's narrative—of Adam and Eve in their first year east of Eden, which his design decrees be as long as the others—drag a bit.

This tension between design and the material it shapes is a matter of artfulness, which is never identical to

wisdom or truth. An issue with all literature, it is explicitly raised here, when Adam, expounding to his sullen older son, pauses to reflect on "the neat way he has put it. Sometimes he has a way with words." The shape of his utterance (he had been likening acceptance of God's will to freedom and resistance to imprisonment) can exert more force than its content.

This observation—a commonplace in rhetoric—becomes a problem the moment one seeks to move between imaginative prose and Scripture, which claims to offer truth unmediated by any form of metonymy. Maine cites the anachronistic Tower of Babel—on his first page—because he wishes to make clear that he understands this, and that his text does not carry Scripture's water in a different bucket. It may have been different in the Garden, but language (Maine seems to be suggesting) no longer enjoys an unbroken state in which Truth bodies forth in *Logos*. If we fail to understand this, Maine is willing to nudge harder: When, after hearing another theological apology from their father, Cain—offering interpretation, not gloss—explains to his bewildered brother, "It's not the literal truth he's saying. It's a metaphor. . . . Like saying time is a river."

Fallen could have easily been called *Broken*, for it is a novel of smash-ups, acts whose resultant disasters can never be set right. The role of the divine is much pondered—the furiously indignant Cain gets no more explanation for why his sacrifice was rejected here than he did in Genesis—but the actions are all committed by humans. The overt artifice of Maine's verbal construction—its reverse wind-up, verbal anachronisms, internal echoes and symmetries—suggests order and intention, but the story itself speaks of missteps, loss, and regret: the inescapable product of human will and the heritage, Maine implies, of our exiled state.

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BRIEFLY NOTED

WICCA'S CHARM: UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUAL HUNGER BEHIND THE RISE OF MODERN WITCHCRAFT AND PAGAN SPIRITUALITY

by CATHERINE EDWARDS SANDERS
Shaw, 256 pages, \$13.99 paper

Catherine Edwards Sanders argues that modern women turn to witchcraft and Goddess-worship because they find Christianity dissatisfying—or rather, because they often encounter dissatisfying Christians. Sanders, who first investigated modern witchcraft as an assignment for a magazine, writes: “I was surprised to discover that even if I didn’t ask any questions about the church, Wiccans always mentioned it.” The women Sanders interviews in her engaging *Wicca’s Charm* cite any number of reasons for their interest in witchcraft, but again and again they say that it satisfies a craving for spirituality and ritual that many Christian communities do not. Given the state of contemporary catechesis, this flight from the churches is not surprising. Most of these women have never been taught that creedal Christianity is not simply a cultural fairy tale. Much less have they been exposed to authentic devotion or formed spiritually themselves. Many such women seek help with the longings and doubts natural to any Christian, but are left without informed, devout explanations of Christian scripture, theology, history, practice, moral teaching, ritual, and liturgy. If a practicing pagan can offer them some kind of answer, how are they to understand just how wrong-headed and dangerous that answer is? *Wicca’s Charm* is worth noting, not because modern witchcraft offers any serious threat to Christianity, but because attraction

to witchcraft is yet another manifestation of modern desires that might be satisfied by Christianity—if modern Christians would only show the way.

—*Mary Angelita Ruiz*

THE BEST AMERICAN SPIRITUAL WRITING 2005

edited by PHILIP ZALESKI
Houghton Mifflin, 240 pages, \$14

Editors predictably look to see how many of the thirty-three essays are from their publication. This year the *New Yorker* has the most (four) and *FIRST THINGS* is tied with *Christian Century* for second place (three each). We’ll have to try harder, and maybe have a talk with Philip Zaleski. In truth, this is a judicious selection of fine writing from the past year along the lines of what is broadly defined as spiritual.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

by WINNIFRED FALLERS SULLIVAN
Princeton University Press, 328 pages, \$29.95

A valuable contribution to “church-state” studies, a genre of which there likely will be no end. Sullivan, a dean at the University of Chicago’s Divinity School, served as an expert witness in a 1999 federal case in Florida, *Warren v. Boca Raton*. People had for years put religious symbols on the graves of their relatives in a city-owned cemetery, and the practice was challenged by the usual suspects as a violation of the no-establishment provision of the First Amendment. Using this case as her centerpiece, the author explores the difficulties, if not impossibility, of defining “religion” for legal purposes, and of making a distinction between “high religion” with clear sacred texts, church-like hierarchies, and authoritative traditions, on the

one hand, and the “low religion” of popular piety evident in the cemetery symbols. Sullivan contends that most of what needs to be protected under the title of religious freedom is provided by other guarantees such as free speech and association. But she acknowledges that religion of whatever species makes an appeal to transcendent authority that challenges the “statist monopoly on law.” The right to religious freedom, therefore, is a space claimed for the right to “life outside the state,” which she believes can best be secured by laws guaranteeing equality. The argument is provocative, if not always persuasive, and students of this subject will not be surprised that she acknowledges her debt to the late Philip Kurland of the University of Chicago law school, who very influentially contended for government “neutrality” with respect to religion.



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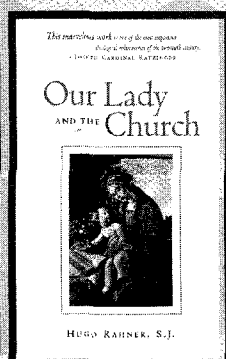
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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion, Culture, and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

THE 45 YEARS THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

It is a commonplace that American public life is today “polarized” to a degree it has never been before. A short definition of polarization is that people no longer view one another as neighbors but as opponents; conversation is displaced by political combat. The unprecedented polarization thesis should be viewed with a measure of skepticism. First, because most people do not live their everyday lives in a manner dominated by political ideologies or allegiances. Second, because there probably have been other times in our history—before and immediately after the Civil War, plus the Depression and New Deal—when political lines were drawn as sharply and public rhetoric was as combatively partisan. In the raucous and rollicking course of history, it is dangerous to say that anything is unprecedented.

In the course of writing my book *Catholic Matters* (forthcoming from Basic Books), I had occasion to revisit Gerhard Lenski’s *The Religious Factor: A Sociologist’s Inquiry*. In the field of the sociology of religion, the book has the status of being at least a near-classic. First published in 1961, Lenski’s inquiry was based on survey research done in 1958. Then and now, although much less now, sociologists and political scientists tended to ignore or downplay “the religious factor” in social attitudes and behavior, including pol-

itics. Lenski argued that the immigration-based “ethnic factor” was in decline and the “socio-religious” factor was in the ascendancy, leading to what he nervously viewed as a “compartmentalized” America.

He was appropriately skeptical of the way in which people then thought about “liberalism” and “conservatism.” “Liberals,” he wrote, “are generally identified with the working classes and the intellectuals, and conservatives with the upper and middle classes.” This essentially Marxian analysis based on “class struggle” is, Lenski concluded, deeply misleading. With Max Weber, he believed that status is more telling than class. In America, the status hierarchy was white Protestants first, Catholics second, Jews third, and “Negroes” fourth. (Obviously, Jews were not third in economic-class standing.) Lenski used four controverted issues that divided people at the time: the welfare state, freedom of speech, support for foreign aid and the United Nations, and racial integration. The working class was “liberal” only on the first, while intellectuals and the middle-to-upper classes favored all four. The old way of distinguishing liberal from conservative, Lenski believed, was of very limited usefulness. The neglected component was “the religious factor,” and the important new component in that connection was the numerical growth and rising status of Catholics in America.

Although he carefully denied (as social scientists do) that he was making predictions, he wrote that “we may expect these gradual changes in population composition to encourage many, or most, of the following

developments.” Then comes an interesting list. Keep in mind that this was before the Second Vatican Council and the many changes and destabilizations that followed in its wake. And keep in mind that Gerhard Lenski was of a very Protestant, almost Barthian, view that biblical religion is at war with the religion of communal-institution adherence epitomized by the Catholic Church. These are among the changes to be expected, he wrote, as a consequence of the growth of Catholic numbers and influence:

1. Rising rates of church attendance in American society
2. Strengthening of religious group communalism
3. Strengthening of both the nuclear and extended family systems
4. Declining emphasis on intellectual independence
5. Increasing support for welfare state policies
6. Increasing support for the Democratic Party
7. Shifting focus of interest from work group to kin group
8. Slowing rate of material progress and perhaps also of scientific advance
9. Rising birth rates
10. Narrowing latitude for exercise of the right of free speech
11. Increasing restraints on Sunday business and divorce, and possibly birth control
12. Declining restraints on gambling and drinking.

Some of these expectations (for instance, 4 and 8) may be attributed to Lenski's low-key anti-Catholic bias. At least six of his expectations definitely have not happened (3, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11). Why not? In large part because, over the last forty years, Catholics have become “just like everybody else.” This, as I argue in *Catholic Matters*, is because the accent has been on being American Catholics rather than on being Catholic Americans. (The adjective modifies, and frequently controls, the noun.) And Lenski's expectations failed because of the imperial judiciary's usurpation of the political process, notably on questions of marriage, family, and sexual ethics. Remember that, on what today are called the “social and moral issues,” the Democratic party was then much more “conservative” than the Republicans.

The critical fact is that many, if not most, Catholics today are not the Catholics that Lenski thought he knew. Of course many other things happened that nobody at that time anticipated: the sexual and cultural revolutions, Vietnam, sundry feminisms, *et al.* But

one might well wonder whether these things would have happened, or would have happened with such pervasive consequences, if so many Catholics had not been persuaded that the “post-Vatican II Church” had liberated them from what Lenski, and almost everyone else at the time, thought was Catholicism. Certainly he and others could not have anticipated the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973, the single most important event of the past half-century in reconfiguring the socio-political alignments in American life.

Like others of that time, Lenski did not anticipate the resurgence of evangelical Protestantism in our public life, a resurgence that began slowly in the 1950s and came to widespread public notice in the second half of the 1970s. He wrote about “white Protestants” at a time when the mainline/oldline Protestant establishment seemed unchallengeably secure. As in Will Herberg's undoubtedly classic *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* of 1955, the “neo-evangelicals” who would later be known simply as evangelicals were hardly a blip on the radar screen. There was a vague awareness of the “fundamentalists” who had slunk away into the wilderness after their devastating defeat at the famous 1925 “monkey trial” in Dayton, Tennessee, never to be heard from again. Among the many ironies of American history is that the return of the fundamentalists, now called evangelicals, met up with now culturally confident Catholics to form the base constituency of politically potent conservatism.

Evangelicals had been notoriously anti-Catholic. So much was this the case that the Southern Baptist Convention, for instance, supported *Roe v. Wade* because the legal protection of the unborn was viewed as an effort to “impose” Catholic doctrine on the nation. By the late 1970s, however, this dramatically changed as evangelicals moved toward the pro-life side of the abortion controversy. Not least of the factors in play was a sharp decline in anti-Catholicism due to a changed perception of the Catholic Church. The Catholic destabilization following the Council was advanced by liberal and progressive forces in the Church, but it had the unexpected consequence of making Catholicism, in the view of evangelicals, less the monolithic threat that they feared.

There were other factors, to be sure—notably the winsome Christian witness of John Paul the Great and Mother Teresa, as well as projects of rapprochement such as Evangelicals and Catholics Together. But the irony remains that the liberalizing dynamics within Catholicism contributed importantly to the conservative convergence of Catholics and evangelical Protestants. One is left wondering how many of Gerhard Lenski's expectations would have been borne out had there been no council and no Catholic Left that

exploited the council to transform the perception of the Catholicism that he and others thought they knew. It may well be that liberal voices such as Fathers Charles Curran and Richard McBrien, along with the *National Catholic Reporter* and kindred spirits, are largely responsible for the religious, cultural, and political convergence of evangelicals and Catholics they now fear.

FT

DOMESTICATING WAR

Joining the continuing debate over whether pacifism and just war doctrine share a *prima facie* "presumption against war" are Helmut David Baer of the University of Texas and Joseph Capizzi of the Catholic University of America. Writing in the *Journal of Religious Ethics*, they make clear enough, as it used to be said, where they are coming from: "Just war theory is properly understood as an expression of a tradition in Christian political thought that can broadly be described as Augustinian. Central to this tradition are a number of convictions. First, political authority is essential to social life. Social action depends upon ordered social relations, and ordered social relations depend partly upon the exercise of organizing power, or authority. Thus, within any community, there are competing interests that political authority must order and adjudicate. Second, force is an essential element of the exercise of political power. Because the ordering of social life encounters resistance from parties pursuing private interests, who if left unopposed would jeopardize the social order, political authority must preserve order and convince private interests to act for common goods they would not typically pursue. Third, the exercise of political power should be placed in the service of genuine goods, such as order, justice, liberty, and community. That is, the forceful power of government must itself be ordered by being brought into conformity with the requirements of morality."

They address the argument of ethicists who say that war is an extreme phenomenon that is beyond the boundaries of political reason. "Just war theory, precisely by bringing moral considerations to bear, seeks to politicize war, and to politicize war is to civilize it. If war were truly discontinuous with politics, then the aims in war would be different from the aims of politics in peacetime, and recourse to war would entail an abandonment of the goods of politics. Far from relegating war to the twilight of our moral and political imagination (where war would necessarily assume a

logic of its own) just war theory seeks to domesticate war by relating it to politics."

Yes, but what is specifically Christian in this understanding? Baer and Capizzi write: "Contemporary pacifists have also failed to provide a full account of political power and the place of government in God's providential care for creation. At least one pacifist has even denied the need to give an account of political authority at all. Thus, Stanley Hauerwas has boldly asserted, 'I simply do not believe that Christians need any theory of the state to inform or guide their witness in whatever society they happen to find themselves.' Surely, however, providing some account of the state is a necessary implication of providing an account of the victory of Christ over the powers of this world. If, as Hauerwas has eloquently argued, Christians place their hope in the Kingdom of God, and seek to embody that Kingdom by living faithfully as church, then they need to have some understanding of the relationship of God's Kingdom to political power. Is the power of the sword now superfluous? Is the sword a manifestation of the Devil's remaining power, a form of the Antichrist? Or has the sword been subjected to Christ's rule and placed in the service of Christ's Kingdom? To fail to provide a theological account of political power is to set premature boundaries around Christ's Kingdom. Thus when Hauerwas asserts that 'the sword of the state is outside the perfection of Christ,' the question we want to ask from the standpoint of the just war tradition is, how can Christians allow the sword to remain outside the perfection of Christ? Has not the sword, too, been claimed by Christ and brought under his reign?"

The "presumption against war" is sometimes expressed as a presumption against violence, with violence defined as any use of lethal force. One may suggest, however, that the difference between violence and force is that the former is unrestrained by political and moral reason. A just war is a morally justified use of lethal power on behalf of political goods, it being understood that "goods" is itself a moral category. In that respect, a just war is not morally different from the just use of force or power in the domestic police function. Please note that Baer, Capizzi, and other proponents of just war doctrine are not making a case for any specific use of lethal power. Such proponents can and do disagree about, for instance, U.S. policy in the Middle East. The great virtue of just war teaching is that it provides the moral framework within which such disagreements can be reasonably engaged. It is not helpful to confuse that necessary conversation and debate by injecting a formula such as the *prima facie* presumption against war. If it means no more than that we ought to prefer that there not be war, the formula is utterly

jeune. If, however, it is proposed not as a preference but as a principle, it gravely distorts moral deliberation about the use of force in the service of justice.

WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ “Chrismukkah.” That was last December’s commercial novelty in the service of inclusiveness. The Catholic League and the New York Board of Rabbis were not amused. They issued a joint statement: “We are deeply concerned about the spiritual misrepresentation of a newly created ‘holiday’ called Chrismukkah. While we as Jews and Christians practice our particular traditions, we also want to see the spiritual integrity of all faiths fully protected. Chanukah and Christmas celebrated during the same period should not be fused into some cultural combination that does not recognize the spiritual identity of our respective faiths. Historically, Chanukah recalls the battle for religious independence that would permit all groups to freely practice their separate traditions without compromise or coercion. Christmas marks a most sacred period announcing the birth of the Christian Messiah, and the beginning of a sacred relationship between Jesus and the Christian people. Copying the tradition of another faith and calling it by another name is a form of shameful plagiarism we cannot condone. Frankly, those who seek to synthesize our spiritual traditions may be well intended, but they are insulting both of us simultaneously. We Jews and Christians respect one another realizing that there is a time to be separate and a time to be together. We see each other as separate spiritual brothers and sisters who will work together to better the human family.” A fine statement, all in all, although I’m not sure about this business of “separate brothers and sisters.” Catholics used to call non-Catholic Christians “separated brethren.” Whether Catholic, Protestant, or Jew, we are in varying degrees separated, but none of us is separate. As witness the above instance of cooperation in defending distinctive, not separate, religious traditions.

■ What is called an identity crisis may be simple embarrassment—sometimes justified, sometimes not—about who we are. Earlier this Fall, the English gathered, on the two hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar, to watch a reenactment of the great event. Andrew Roberts writes in the *New Criterion*: “In order to save the French and Spanish participants

in the review any embarrassment at having been defeated two hundred years ago, the reenactment of the battle was fought not between the British and Combined Fleets, but between what were euphemistically dubbed the red and blue fleets. Although an actor playing Nelson, with eye patch and empty shirtsleeve, was rowed on board the sailing ship representing HMS *Victory*, for reasons of political correctness the Navy organizers did not want formally to identify the reenactment as actually being of Trafalgar itself.” Editor Roger Kimball adds: “In October 1805, when news of the battle reached London, the *Times* announced the event with a three-part banner headline that advised Londoners, first, that a great victory had been won, second, that the French fleet had been destroyed, and, third, that Admiral Nelson had been killed. Today, it’s prizes for everyone, as the dodo in *Alice in Wonderland* insisted: nobody won, really, and let’s not be beastly to the French.” Everybody won, nobody won, whatever. With no causes to celebrate and no causes to mourn, history is, to paraphrase Elbert Hubbard, one nothing after another.

■ To students and parents inquiring about a solidly Catholic college, I would usually mention some of the obvious ones: Steubenville, Ave Maria, Thomas Aquinas. And then, not only because I was on the board there, I would suggest they not overlook the University of Dallas. People were sometimes taken aback, however, when I suggested they take a close look at Notre Dame where, if one chose carefully, one could get a thoroughly Catholic education. Many conservative Catholics had given up on Notre Dame, assuming it had gone the way of Georgetown and Boston College. That impression was largely due to the prominence of Fr. Richard McBrien, long-time chairman of the theology department and a kind of Peck’s Bad Boy in adolescent rebellion against church authority. Things have been changing at Notre Dame, however, and people should take another look. The current head of theology is John Cavadini, who has a lively sense of the Christian, and specifically Catholic, intellectual tradition, and the new president of Notre Dame is Father John Jenkins, who said this in his inaugural address: “There are certainly many other truly great universities in this country. Many of them began as religious, faith-inspired institutions, but nearly all have left that founding character behind. One finds among them a disconnect between the academic enterprise and an over-arching religious and moral framework that orients academic activity and defines a good human life.” Speaking of what he hopes Notre Dame will be: “This is no easy mission. But its difficulty is not our concern; we did not create the mission, and we

cannot change it. The word 'mission' derives from the Latin root *missus*—which means 'sent.' We have been sent—to seek God, study the world, and serve humanity." It may be premature to say for certain, but it does seem that Notre Dame is on the way back.

■ When Simon Wiesenthal, commonly referred to as the world's foremost Nazi-hunter, died this September at age ninety-six, there were many and laudatory obituaries. Rabbi Marc Gellman reminds us, however, that Wiesenthal came in for criticism, also from his admirers. "The most striking thing about Wiesenthal was how he always connected the Holocaust to the struggle for human rights for all people. In his public speeches, he always referred to 'the 11 million victims' murdered in the Nazi concentration camps. He refused to use the iconic number of 6 million. He would explain himself by reminding his audiences that although 6 million Jews had indeed been murdered in the camps, 5 million other non-Jewish non-combatants were also murdered there, as well. His critics were angry with him for this inclusive sensibility. They argued that even though 5 million non-Jews died in the camps, they were built specifically to kill Jews. These critics charged that to speak of the other victims of the concentration camps distorts the uniquely Jewish nature of the Holocaust. The other 5 million victims of the camps: gypsies, socialists, communists, other anti-Nazis, homosexuals and disabled persons. They were, so their argument goes, just caught up and murdered because of the extra killing capacity of the camps and the slave labor sites that were built to kill Jews. Six or 11? I understand and sympathize with Wiesenthal's critics, however I agree with Wiesenthal's math. The number I pick when I do my Holocaust remembrance is also 11." Of course, there were also many millions who were victims of the Nazis, although they were not killed in the extermination camps. Gellman's point is that we should resist using victims to score political points, citing the way in which some tried to recruit Hurricane Katrina for their racial demagoguery. (He does not mention the Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton by name.) We need, writes Gellman, to "learn a new math, the arithmetic of one." Then we can "nurture a spiritual generosity that moments of mass death so easily seem to strip from us. Then we can answer the thieves of suffering who tell us whom we should honor in our grief and whom we should ignore."

■ Some evangelicals of the Calvinist persuasion are unhappy with a statement unanimously adopted by the forty-two-member board of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE): "For the Health of the

Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility." Substantively, the positions taken on sundry issues are very different, but the statement is strikingly similar in form to the numerous promulgations emanating over the decades from the offices of the liberal Protestant establishment that is now in apparently irreversible decline. Or so these critics say. Keep in mind that these are serious Westminster Calvinists, a small minority in evangelicaldom. But they have a point worthy of notice. The NAE statement declares that "the Lord calls the church to speak prophetically to society and work for the renewal and reform of its structures." The language is straight from the old National Council of Churches, and strikingly similar to the left-leaning Chicago Statement of Evangelical Social Concern of 1973, a project of the relentless Ron Sider who also helped the NAE with its drafting. The statement asserts that "God has called all people to share responsibility for creating a healthy society," and calls upon "all Christians" to involve themselves in a host of causes: religious freedom, the sanctity of life, justice and compassion for the poor, human rights, peace, the restraint of violence, and the environment. As Oscar Wilde said of socialism, such involvement would leave most people with no free evenings. More important, if liberals were criticized, and rightly criticized, for identifying their politics with the word of the Lord, conservatives are not exempt from the same criticism. The Church (upper case) and the several churches encourage responsible citizenship, but they should not promulgate political platforms. Christian citizens can and do disagree on specific policies, resulting in different political alignments. Critics of the NAE statement think it smacks of papism. The Catholic Church does have a social doctrine that sets forth in an intellectually sophisticated way theologically-grounded teachings regarding human nature, society, and the meaning of justice. Such social doctrine provides directions but, with few exceptions (for instance, the defense of innocent human life), does not provide directives of immediate applicability to policy questions on which people of good faith, guided by reason and conscience, can come to different conclusions. And, of course, the Catholic Church makes claims of authoritative teaching authority not made by other Christian communities, and certainly not by the NAE. The critics are closer to the mark in seeing similarities between the NAE statement and the pronouncements of liberal Protestant churches. There is little of policy substance in the NAE statement with which I would disagree, but the tonalities of "Thus saith the Lord" are disquieting. There are significant differences between the National Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals, but it would be of slight bene-

fit either to Christian witness or to our public life if the moral presumption of the left were replaced by the moral presumption of the right.

■ **If It Can Be Done It Will Be Done.** That is the motto of those who are eager to take us into Huxley's brave new world, and beyond. If it can be done it *must* be done, is the argument of such as Ray Kurzweil who writes of "the Singularity," the impending moment in which technology takes over from nature in the evolution of the human species. At this preliminary point we are still arguing about issues such as the creation and exploitation of embryonic stem cells, but Robert George of Princeton, a frequent contributor to these pages and member of the President's Council on Bioethics, says the post-humanists have bigger things in mind. Witness their coolness to the breakthrough that permits the production of embryonic-type stem cells that can do everything that embryonic stem cells do but do so without creating or destroying a human embryo. Not to mention their indifference to the fact that, while adult and umbilical-cord stem cells are being used in the treatment of many diseases, there is not even one embryonic stem cell therapy even in clinical trials. So what do the scientific post-humanists really want? They want, says George, to move beyond embryos to fetuses. With "fetal farming," they will be able to exploit and destroy unborn children at will. New Jersey already permits this, and is urging other states to follow its lead. Robert George writes: "So we find ourselves at a critical juncture. On the one hand, techniques for obtaining pluripotent stem cells without destroying embryos will, it appears, soon eliminate any plausible argument for killing pre-implantation embryos. This is great news. On the other hand, these developments have, if I am correct, smoked out the true objectives of at least some who have been leading the charge for embryonic stem cell research. Things cannot remain as they are. The battle over embryonic stem cell research will determine whether we as a people move in the direction of restoring our sanctity of life ethic, or go in precisely the opposite direction. Either we will protect embryonic human life more fully than we do now, or we will begin creating human beings precisely as 'organ factories.' Those of us on the pro-life side must take the measure of the problem quickly so that we can develop and begin implementing a strategy that takes the nation in the honorable direction."

■ It's not quite in the league of the evangelical Protestant missionary tract that said, "There are only a few thousand Christians in Poland. The rest of the population is Catholic." But *Christianity Today* comes close

with an article titled, "Reconstruction: How Eastern Europe's Evangelicals are Restoring the Church's Vitality." The first part of the article is about the Czech Republic, a largely secularized country that needs all the Christian witness it can get. But the second part is about Poland, a vibrantly Catholic society with less than one percent of Christians being non-Catholics. The article enthusiastically recounts the growth of "the church" in Poland as "Christians" (meaning evangelical Protestants) establish new churches and house-based Bible study groups drawing hundreds of Poles away from the Catholic Church. Evangelicals and Catholics Together, anyone? If many Poles lack "a deep relationship with Christ," as the article says and as is no doubt the case, one might think evangelicals could help the Catholic Church to be more pastorally effective. The line between evangelizing and proselytizing is disputed, but sheep-stealing is easy enough to spot. I have a different understanding of the current state of Polish religion, culture, and politics than do the authors in *Christianity Today* (see my article "The New Europes" in the October issue of *FIRST THINGS*), but that is not the point. (The authors, by the way, say they are relying on the research of Jonathan Luxmoore who writes for the leftward British publication, the *Tablet*.) The point is that, after all that has been said about the changed relationship between evangelicals and Catholics, including all that has been said in *Christianity Today*, some evangelicals have not gotten very far beyond the above-mentioned missionary tract. On the other hand, nobody said it would be easy to remedy centuries of Christian divisiveness.

■ Juries don't get to make the law. They render verdicts between parties according to what they are told is the law. Some while back, a jury in Milwaukee found the archdiocese liable because a volunteer, driving her own car, ran a red light and caused an accident while delivering a statue of the Virgin Mary to an invalid. The volunteer was a member of the Legion of Mary, which is not directed by the Archdiocese but meets on church property. The Archdiocese was ordered to pay \$17 million to the victim of the accident. It is reported that in some parts of the country churches are terminating the venerable institution of the potluck supper because of elaborate state-imposed health regulations and the fear of legal liability. Addressing the dangers of the potluck supper is, according to the minions of the nanny state, long overdue. Philip K. Howard heads up Common Good, a legal reform organization, and he writes: "Extreme verdicts are relatively rare, and usually reduced on appeal. The harm is to the fabric of freedom. People no longer feel comfortable doing what's right and good. Legal fear now infects social

dealings throughout society. This fear also has a flip-side, an opportunity for exploitation when something goes wrong: *Maybe we can get rich, too*. Cultural bonds begin to strain. The values that hold our society together, exemplified best in the spirit of volunteerism, are replaced by distrust and defensiveness. Want to take your child's class on a field trip?"

■ The second edition of *The Churching of America: 1776-2005* by Roger Finke and Rodney Stark is out from Rutgers University Press and it is well worth a look. First published in 1993, the study caused quite a stir, in large part because religious folk bridled at the socioeconomic approach suggesting that religion, like everything else, is a product to be hustled in the marketplace. Martin Marty's reaction in the *Christian Century* was typical: "Finke and Stark's world contains no God or religion or spirituality, no issue of truth or beauty or goodness, no faith or hope or love, no justice or mercy; only winning or losing in the churching game matters." Foul! cry the authors. "Marty knew perfectly well that our major emphasis was on faith in God. On the very first page of the book we wrote, 'to the degree that denominations rejected traditional doctrines and ceased to make serious demands on their followers, they ceased to prosper. The churching of America was accomplished by aggressive churches committed to vivid otherworldliness.'" Finke and Stark are right about that. Their offense was to apply rigorous econometric analysis to "spiritual realities" that many feel should be shielded from such vulgar examination. Catholics with a Thomistic appreciation of "secondary causes" are less uneasy with the prosaic ways in which the Spirit works. *The Churching of America* does the historical and statistical grunt work supporting Dean Kelley's important 1972 book, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*. A similar point was underscored in the 1975 "Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation," which declared the "loss of transcendence" to be at the heart of the debilitation of Christianity in America. The new edition of *Churching* brings the data and analysis up to the present, but the thesis remains very much the same. Most attention is paid various Protestant groups which have a tradition of religious entrepreneurship. With a burgeoning Catholic population and shortage of priests, Catholics tend to take a different view of these matters. Catholics are generally not in the "church growth" business. In most parts of the country, more members is the last thing that a priest wants. His complaint is that he can't respond to all the demands already made on his attention. Among younger priests, however, it is understood that evangelization of the wandering and the never-reached is a

permanent part of the Church's reason for being. There is an interesting section in which Finke and Stark examine the most "liberal" and "traditional" dioceses and religious orders and discover that, by every index of growth and vitality, the traditionals are doing much better, and usually dramatically so. One might suggest that *The Churching of America* is a careful and massive documentation of the self-evident: A religious community's powers of attraction and adherence are in direct proportion to its offering something that is not available elsewhere. Chiefly, that something has to do with transcendent hope and truth claims, a clear course of growth in discipleship, and a sense of belonging that is rooted in a rich tradition. Econometric graphs and tables may not be the most edifying way to make the point, but the point should not surprise those who understand that the God who became incarnate employs the dynamics of human nature in building and sustaining institutions of ultimate allegiance through penultimate means.

■ "It is a great virtue of liberal democracy that everyone—even presidents and cardinals—may express contentious opinions in the public square. But when the rhetoric of a cardinal archbishop is indistinguishable from that of a president, I worry a bit." The writer is especially worried when the president is George W. Bush who, he says, has "dusted off a shopworn bit of far-right GOP dogma." William D. Wood, writing in *Commonweal*, is exercised by Bush's assertion in Latvia last spring that the western powers at Yalta abandoned central and eastern Europe to Soviet tyranny. "This specious interpretation of Yalta," writes Wood, "has been debunked by historians, and Bush was criticized by many for reviving it." Well, yes, the interpretation has been attacked by many, most notably by those who championed Soviet-American coexistence, if not friendship, until the last gasp of the evil empire. Wood proposes what he apparently thinks is the clinching argument: "The effect of Yalta was not to deliver Eastern Europe to an oppressive Communist regime. Stalin's Red Army had been in place well before the 'Big Three' gathered at Yalta." There is truth in that. The tragic decision at Yalta was to do nothing about it. Wood is criticizing Francis Cardinal George of Chicago for agreeing, in a speech at the Lumen Christi Institute in Chicago, with Bush. Cardinal George was speaking from notes and one cannot tell from Wood's tendentious paraphrasing what he actually said. But there are many thoughtful students of history who agree with the judgment that Yalta was a betrayal of those countries that were consigned to decades of oppression behind what was aptly termed the iron curtain. Notable among them

was John Paul II, who wrote about this sad history in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* and elsewhere. To suggest that this view is “a shopworn bit of far-right GOP dogma” is simply silly. The gravamen of Wood’s exercise, titled “Back to Christendom,” is that Cardinal George is nostalgic for a union of throne and altar in order to counter liberal democracy’s slide into secularism. This, too, is simply silly. I have had occasion to raise questions about what I think is Cardinal George’s sometimes excessively grim view of liberal democracy in general and its American form in particular. But to argue that he yearns for a restoration of imperial Christendom either here or in Europe serves no purpose other than to titillate the readers of a magazine that is prone to indulging in anti-hierarchical protest, even if it has to invent cardinal offenses.

■ The religious fervor sparked by evolution theory is reflected in a *New York Times* editorial supporting scientists and editors who have “proposed standards that enshrine evolution as a central concept of modern biology.” Enshrine, as in (according to Webster’s) “to preserve or cherish as sacred.” The editors’ case for establishing their religion is set forth under the title “The Evolution of Creationism.” Their point is that, in Kansas and elsewhere, the creationists want to get “their foot in the door” by allowing in the classroom notions such as “intelligent design” that will inevitably lead to the teaching that “the evolution of humanity, in one way or another, was the work of an all-powerful deity” (a.k.a. God). Some people “even seek to change the definition of science in a way that appears to leave room for supernatural explanations of the origin and evolution of life, not just natural explanations, the usual domain of science.” Of course, allowing *only* natural explanations supports an assumed and practical atheism, often backed up by the explicit and theoretical atheism of some of evolution’s most militant champions. The *Times* is right, though, that the definition of science is at stake. Tracing the evolution of the word “science” in the OED is instructive. The first definition is “the state or fact of knowing.” Only in the late nineteenth century did “science” come to refer exclusively to the natural or material. Before that, what we call science was called natural philosophy. Philosophy is the search for knowledge and, finally, wisdom. When attention to the natural and material rigorously excludes other ways to knowledge and wisdom, science becomes scientism, which is, both methodologically and substantively, atheistic. That is what the *Times* and many others want to “enshrine” in government schools. Less pious and more intellectually curious educators want to take alternative explanations into account. With

respect to the origin of life, they are not satisfied with the irrational and thoroughly unscientific claim that everything came from nothing. On no other question does science or ordinary human experience suggest that anything is uncaused or caused by nothing. On the same day, however, the science section of the *Times* had a long and favorable report on the work of Dr. Elisabeth Lloyd of Indiana University who contends that evolutionary explanations of the female orgasm are unconvincing. In a pithy summary of her years of research, Dr. Lloyd concludes that the female orgasm “is for fun.” So it would appear that an all-powerful deity or an intelligent designer, or whoever or whatever, also has an interest in human delight. Not, mind you, that I am suggesting we should “enshrine” Dr. Lloyd’s theory.

■ The first time I had occasion to engage Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict, over several days of conversation was in connection with our annual Erasmus Lecture, which he gave in 1988. The conference following the lecture addressed the contemporary crisis in biblical interpretation and resulted in a little book, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, now, unfortunately, out of print. The gist of Ratzinger’s argument is nicely caught in an essay on the tenth anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and included in a fine collection just published by Ignatius Press, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*. He writes: “This dynamic view of the Bible, in the context of the lived and ongoing history of the people of God, leads then to another important insight about the nature of Christianity: ‘Still, the Christian faith is not a “religion of the book,”’ says the *Catechism* succinctly (CCC 108). This is an extremely important statement. The faith does not refer simply to a book, which as such would be the sole and final authority for the believer. In the center of the Christian faith stands, not a book, but a person—Jesus Christ, who is himself the living Word of God and who interprets himself, so to speak, in the words of Scripture, which conversely can be understood correctly, however, only in a life with him, in a living relationship to him. And since Christ has built and is building for himself the Church, the people of God, as his living organism, his ‘Body,’ it follows that part and parcel of the relationship with him is fellowship with the pilgrim people, which is actually the human author and proprietor of the Bible, as we have heard. If the living Christ is the genuine norm for interpreting the Bible, that means that we understand this book correctly only within the synchronic and diachronic understanding of the faith [that is, the understanding at any given time and over time] shared

by the whole Church. Outside of this lived connection, the Bible is merely a more or less heterogeneous literary anthology, not a present-day signpost for our life. Scripture and tradition cannot be separated. This necessary connection has been described in an unsurpassable manner by the great theologian from Tübingen Johann Adam Möhler in his classic work *Die Einheit der Kirche* ["The Unity of the Church"]; I cannot be emphatic enough in recommending that you read it. The *Catechism* sets forth this connection, which includes at the same time the Church's authority to interpret Scripture, as the Second Letter of Peter explicitly testifies: 'First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation' (2 Peter 1:20)." Johann Adam Möhler, who died in 1838, was a principal representative of the "Tübingen School" that was considered very controversial at the time and contributed significantly to the reformulations adopted by the Second Vatican Council. Speaking of Tübingen, one notes that in September Pope Benedict invited Father Hans Küng, the most celebrated (and criticized) dissident of the post-conciliar era, for several hours of reportedly friendly conversation at Castel Gandolfo. So what's going on here? Some real-wingers on the right are fretting that Ratzinger, now that he is pope, is reverting to his "liberalism" of many decades ago. That is nonsense. As all who know him can testify, Benedict is very much a theologian who is at ease in engaging those who disagree with him and with the magisterial teaching of the Church. If tomorrow, as I do not expect, it is announced that Rome has restored Father Küng's certification as a Catholic theologian, it will no doubt be because he has been persuaded to mend his errant ways. At which all should rejoice.

■ Bear with me, for there is so much good stuff in *On the Way to Christ*. Herewith an extended reflection on the moral life. "The *Catechism* does not claim to offer the only possible or even the best systematic formulation of moral theology—that was not its purpose. It demonstrates the essential anthropological and theological connections that are essential to the moral activity of men. Its point of departure is its description of the dignity of man, which constitutes his greatness and at the same time the basis of his obligations. Then it shows that man's desire to be happy is the interior driving force and guide of moral action. Man's primordial drive, which no one can deny and which no one, ultimately, opposes, is his desire for happiness, for a successful, fulfilled life. Morality, for the *Catechism*, which relies on the Church Fathers, especially Augustine, is doctrine concerning the prosperous life—so to speak, the elaboration of the rules in the game of hap-

piness. The book combines this primordial human thought with the beatitudes of Jesus, which detach the concept of happiness from all banality, reveal its true depth, and thus manifest the connection between happiness and the good in general, the Good in person—God. Then the basic components of moral action are set forth: freedom, the object and intention of the act, the passions [emotions], conscience, the virtues, sin—which is a failure of virtue—the social character of being human, and then finally the relation between law and grace. Christian moral theology is never simply an ethics of law, yet it also goes beyond the framework of an ethics of virtue. It is an ethics-in-dialogue, because the moral activity of man unfolds from his encounter with God, which means that no longer is it just one's own self-sufficient and autonomous action, mere human accomplishment, but rather a response to the gift of love and so an involvement in the dynamic of love—God's own Self, a dynamic that makes man truly free and brings him to the true height of his dignity. Moral action is therefore never simply one's own accomplishment, but neither is it just something propped up from outside. Genuine moral action is entirely a gift, and yet precisely in this way it is entirely our own doing, because what is one's own can unfold only in the gift of love, and, conversely, the gift does not render man powerless but rather brings him back to himself."

■ If you're still with me, note what Ratzinger says to the objection of some Protestants that the *Catechism* is not sufficiently ecumenical and, more particularly, that it fails to address directly the sixteenth-century points of disputation. Ratzinger writes that the catechism "has situated the doctrine on justification at the heart of its ethics, because in this way the intertwining of grace and freedom becomes comprehensible, and the reader realizes that being-from-someone-else is true being-in-oneself and also being-for-others." He continues: "The section on justification is an important ecumenical contribution of the *Catechism*. It shows, at the same time, that one cannot adequately discover the ecumenical dimension of the book merely by looking for citations from ecumenical documents in it or by checking the index for current catchwords; it becomes evident only when one reads the book in its entirety and thereby sees how thoroughly it is informed by the search for what unifies." In other words, what the *Catechism* says about Christian unity is much more than what appears under the title of Christian unity.

■ Richard E. Morgan is professor of constitutional law at Bowdoin College and he thinks that Mark

Kozlowski's argument has the merit of candor when Kozlowski says that the American people are not capable of self-government and need the courts to decide the really big questions. Kozlowski's book is *The Myth of the Imperial Judiciary: Why the Right is Wrong About the Courts*. Morgan writes: "There are respectable arguments to be made for aristocracy, and supporters of the expanded judicial imperium should get about making them (indeed, a few have). What is inescapable, however, is that such arguments, whatever their theoretical merit, cannot be reconciled with the principles of republican self-government that are the historical core of the American constitutional order."

■ The retirement of Leon Kass as chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics should not go unremarked. Leon is a dear friend and a contributor to these pages. I have over the years worked with him on many projects. As I have said on other occasions, he is probably the most morally earnest person I know and among the most morally intelligent. The establishment of the council, announced by President Bush in his first primetime address to the nation in August 2001, is one of the more important initiatives of this administration. Its work has been largely ignored or misrepresented in the general media, and even some of those who recognize the urgency of the questions it engages have criticized it as an academic shop-talk. In fact, and due in no small part to Leon Kass' leadership, it has been an invaluable instrument for sustaining an informed conversation about human dignity under assault from massively funded and morally unbridled scientific engineers who aim at not only enhancing human life but at redefining what it means to be human. The nation owes a great debt to Leon Kass, who will remain a member of the council and will be succeeded as chairman by Edmund Pellegrino, a man with a long track record of incisively addressing these questions of awe-full importance to the human future.

■ It is frequently noted that the National Council of Churches, once one of the main institutions of what was thought to be the American mainstream, has come upon very hard times, with its survival very much in question. Originally established by the "ecumenical" Protestant communities (with nominal Orthodox participation) in order to advance Christian unity and common Christian witness on public questions of moral moment, it seems the NCC is now striving to survive as something very different. In a recent letter the General Secretary, former Democratic congressman Bob Edgar, lambasts conservative

Christians as "fundamentalists," bemoans the "tragic" and "unjust" policies of the Bush administration, both foreign and domestic, and boasts of the NCC's work with MoveOn.org and others in turning out the "progressive" vote in 2004. The purpose of the letter is to raise one million dollars a year so that the NCC can compete with organizations promoting "the right wing agenda." When Edgar took over in 2000, the NCC was running millions in the red, and was forced to reduce its budget from \$10 million to \$6 million and its staff from over a hundred to fewer than forty. Programs of ecumenical and theological dialogue have been discarded. Giving from the thirty-six member communions has since declined by a third, to less than \$2 million a year. To keep going, the NCC now depends less on its member churches than on foundations and direct mail appeals. Groups such as MoveOn.org, the Sierra Club, the Tides Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, along with liberal celebrity donors such as Ben Cohen, Peter Dinklage, and Vanessa Redgrave have contributed heavily to NCC's political causes. So it appears that the NCC may survive after all. But not as a national council of churches. While not formally disowning the religious associations that once brought it into being, the NCC, in its programs and support base, is now just another political advocacy organization. It is a great sadness.

■ This summer Paul Martin, Liberal prime minister of Canada, appointed Michelle Jean as Governor General. Born in Haiti, holding also French citizenship, and married to a maker of far-left documentaries, Jean is the second woman in a row appointed to the post, both of them hosts of Canadian television shows. In her public remarks and in media commentary on the appointment there was scarcely a reference to the Governor General being the representative of the Queen in Canada. The focus was on gender equality, multiculturalism, and how the photogenic and media-savvy Ms. Jean would provide the rest of Canada and the world with a very attractive face and voice for the ever-querulous province of Quebec. About the same time, as it happened, a Canadian friend gave me a little book, *In Weakness, Strength: The Spiritual Sources of Georges P. Vanier, 19th Governor General of Canada*, written by his son Jean Vanier and published in 1969. (According to *Amazon.com*, it is still in print.) As a distinguished soldier and diplomat, Vanier's life combined the active and contemplative in a disciplined life of devotion to God and public service. He loved Canada and was greatly loved in return. When he died in 1967, he was publicly mourned as no Canadian had been before. In his inaugural address as Governor General on September 15, 1959, he said: "My first

words are a prayer. May Almighty God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy bless the sacred mission which has been entrusted to me by Her Majesty the Queen and help me to fulfill it in all humility. In exchange for His strength, I offer my weakness. May He give peace to this beloved land of ours and to those who live in it the grace of mutual understanding." Such a statement by a Governor General today would be fiercely controversial and perhaps illegal. Of course times change, with no guarantee that the change is for the better. Canada's declension of recent decades can be measured in many ways, and not least by the comparison between the quietly profound dignity of Georges Vanier and the politically correct media buzz generated by Michelle Jean. *In Weakness, Strength* is, by the way, a devotional biography very much worth reading.

■ Call it a point of personal privilege. What's the use of being editor in chief if I can't indulge the prompting of nostalgia? And I do think it may be of interest to some readers. The prompting comes from *Walking George: The Life of George John Beto and the Rise of the Modern Texas Prison System* by David M. Horton and George R. Nielsen (University of North Texas Press, 257 pages, \$29.95). George Beto was president of Concordia College, Austin, Texas, where I was a student in the early 1950s. Later, he was president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod seminary then in Springfield, Illinois (now in Fort Wayne, Indiana), and ended up as director of the Texas prison system. He died at age seventy-five in 1991. Beto, as I knew him, was a big and manly man who cultivated a down-home style, including Stetson hat and cowboy boots, that was dismissive of complicated ideas and verged on anti-intellectualism. But he was wise in the ways of God and man, and we students regarded "Big George" with a mix of fear and admiration. I can vividly recall some of his rambling but effective lectures. For instance, the explanation of why the Prince of Wales, briefly Edward VIII, was the most pitiable man in the world because he put his feelings before his duty. I was something of a rebel at the time. One night I was rabbling a group of students on why we should all go out on strike in protest against something or the other Beto had done (I forget what). I had reached a fine pitch and I felt the students were with me when, suddenly, all faces fell and the room was hushed. Unbeknownst to me, Big George, Stetson and all, had come in and was standing behind me. "Brother Neuhaus, if you don't like it here, you can leave." I stayed, and that was the end of the insurrection. While there are interesting bits on the troubles that would later tear apart the Missouri Synod, *Walking George* (a nickname he earned for his near-omnipresence in the

prisons) is mainly about Beto and prison reform. John J. DiIulio, who is an expert on the subject, says Beto changed the way prisons are run in ways "that they didn't even start teaching at top professional schools until decades later." I'll take his word on that. I am grateful for the memory of George Beto at Concordia College, Austin. In later years he would send me notes, mainly encouraging, on things I had written. I think he, too, was glad I stayed. In the language still heard in those distant days, *Er war ein Mensch*.

■ If you're planning to adopt the view of reality propounded by Mark C. Taylor in *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption*, you'd better have tenure, medical insurance, and a good pension. So says Eugene McCarraher of Villanova University who reviews Taylor's book in *Books & Culture*. Taylor, who teaches humanities at Williams College, has brilliantly navigated the cultural, intellectual, and religious twists and turns of recent decades and has now hit pay dirt, so to speak, by embracing the free-market economy. McCarraher writes: "All attempts to impose order from outside, whether political or religious, will inhibit and pervert the creative energy that surges through life, and especially through contemporary capitalism. Indeed, the very instability and evanescence of the info-capitalist order can enrich our lives if we embrace rather than fear uncertainty and ephemerality. If we welcome unreservedly the volatility of financial and technological change, life can be 'a confidence game in which the abiding challenge is not to find redemption but to learn to live without it.' Postmodern *jouissance* and market calculation form a lucrative partnership, sponsored by Hayek and Nietzsche. As Zarathustra spoke, 'joy is everlasting flow,' and economics morphs into a gay and not a dismal science." Forget about transcendent hope; everything that is and will be is on offer here and now, according to the confidence man. McCarraher adds: "In good postmodern fashion he rejects any final resolution or transcendence of our historical maelstrom as an authoritarian closure of possibility. Taylor's essentially neo-liberal affirmation of financial markets as self-reflexive and self-correcting reads, to me, like a micro-waved rehash of Smith and Hayek, and it dovetails nicely with his nihilist celebration of immanence as the unbounded play of desire. So, Augustine, it seems, was wrong to desire a home for his restless heart. 'The endless rustle of desire,' Taylor writes, renders impotent and illusory all attempts at salvation and permanence. Thus can Taylor affirm the plenitude of life, and conclude with a rapturous vista of middlebrow gusto: 'the interplay of light and darkness,' he writes, is 'inescapably disruptive, overwhelmingly beautiful, and'—you guessed

it—‘infinitely complex.’” Taking off from George Gilder’s concept of economics “transcending matter,” Taylor exults in a world of airy weightlessness, at least for the privileged. McCarraher observes: “To be even more pointedly materialist, Taylor’s economy is unpopulated by office temps, dishwashers, cable installers, Filipino assembly-line workers who destroy their eyesight soldering computer circuits. There are no adjuncts who staff the courses that the tenured are too busy or proud to teach, no janitorial staff who dump their trashcans and vacuum their carpets, no domestic laborers who clean their kitchens, bedrooms, and toilets. There are no sweatshops, no overworked and underpaid counter help, no factory operatives or data-entry clerks without pensions or health insurance. In short, because they don’t show up in the network—except perhaps as the cost of doing business—most of the world’s population doesn’t merit Taylor’s attention.” While Taylor is intoxicated with the clever playing of economic confidence games, McCarraher betrays an unbridled animus against the market economy. The alternative to both, one might suggest, is proposed by the 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, which is to include within the circle of productivity and exchange the many who legitimately seek this world’s goods while well knowing that their restless hearts point them elsewhere.

■ On the other hand, Craig Gay of Regent College in Vancouver thinks there is a great deal to Mark Taylor’s argument in *Confidence Games*. Writing in the *Journal of Markets & Morality*, he agrees with Taylor that there is something very odd about the current coalition of social conservatives and enthusiasts for neoliberal economics. The latter is producing an increasingly “spectral” world of postmodernist virtual realities, economic and otherwise. “In the final analysis,” says Taylor, “the problem is not to find redemption from a world that often seems dark but to learn to live without redemption in a world where the interplay of light and darkness creates infinite shades of difference, which are inescapably disruptive, overwhelmingly beautiful, and infinitely complex.” That’s where Gay draws the line, however. He writes: “On the cultural side, however, I refuse to believe that the increasing vacuity of postmodern culture is either inevitable or cathartic. Call me old-fashioned, but the traditional Christian understanding of *sin*—that is of the desperate human attempt to construct a pseudo-reality *over and against* God and his good creation—does a far better job of explaining contemporary circumstances than does a Hegelian dialectic shorn of the notions of synthesis and reason. I fail to understand, too, how surrendering any and all hope of redemption can be

construed as ‘liberating.’ After all, redemption is neither an ideal nor merely an idea; it is a *promise*. It is a promise, furthermore, that can only be grasped by faith, hope, and love. While a great many aspects of this present age may well be characterized as confidence games, then, our world is not, thankfully, a ‘world without redemption.’” One might make so bold as to suggest that the fundamental disagreement is that Taylor asserts and Gay denies that the conversation begins with the assumption that “God is dead.” For all of Gay’s appreciation of Taylor’s argument, that does make a very big difference.

■ They are called the three masters of suspicion: Marx, Freud, and Darwin, each in his own way, defied tradition (not only Christian tradition) and commonsensical confidence by persuading large sectors of the brightest and best that things are not as they seem. By invoking, respectively, false consciousness, the unconscious, and materialistic determinism, they and their followers claimed to have debunked the constituting convictions of western culture. Today even approximately orthodox Marxists and Freudians are scarcely to be found, and, says British historian Paul Johnson, fervent Darwinists are inadvertently undoing the cause they champion. “At a revivalist meeting of Darwinians two or three years ago, I heard the chairman, the fiction-writer Ian McEwan, call out, ‘Yes, we do think God is an old man in the sky with a beard, and his name is Charles Darwin.’ I doubt if there is a historical precedent for this investment of so much intellectual and emotional capital, by so many well-educated and apparently rational people, in the work of a single scientist. And to anyone who has studied the history of science and noted the chances of any substantial body of teaching—based upon a particular hypothesis or set of observations—surviving the erosion of time and new research intact, it is inevitable that Darwinism, at least in its fundamentalist form, will come crashing down. The only question is: when? The likelihood that Darwin’s eventual debacle will be sensational and brutal is increased by the arrogance of his acolytes, by their insistence on the unchallengeable truth of the theory of natural selection—which to them is not a hypothesis but a demonstrated fact, and its critics mere flat-earthers—and by their success in occupying the commanding heights in the university science departments and the scientific journals, denying a hearing to anyone who disagrees with them. I detect a groundswell of discontent at this intellectual totalitarianism, so unscientific by its very nature. It is wrong that any debate, especially one on so momentous a subject as the origin of species, and the human race above all, should be arbitrarily declared to be

closed, and the current orthodoxy set in granite for all time. Such a position is not tenable, and the evidence that it is crumbling is growing."

■ The women's fashion section of the *New York Times* seems an appropriate place for the advertisement to which a kind reader directed my attention. The ad is for donor eggs supplied by the Genetics and IVF Institute, which goes by the acronym GIVF (as in gift). We are told that the organization "has long met the high expectations of sophisticated patients from around the world." "Fully prescreened donors... include many Doctoral Donors in advanced degree programs, and numerous other egg donors with special accomplishments, talents, or ethnicity. Current and childhood photos are available." Eugenics, anyone? One may reasonably expect that the sophisticated, upper class readers of the fashion section are deeply committed to equality, multiculturalism, and engaging the Other—all at a safe distance. They are appalled by racial, religious, ethnic, or class prejudices—except their own. They are concerned for the disadvantaged, of course, but, when it comes to one of their own, why accept an inferior baby if you can afford to buy the very best? If only all those inferior people who are the object of our compassion had been properly prescreened, just imagine the much nicer world of people who are, well, to be frank about it—people like us.

■ Harry Blackmun was a very dull Republican, a square in fact, who helped rich doctors at the Mayo Clinic do their tax returns and gave them advice on estate planning. He was also a crony of Warren Burger, then Chief Justice, and, nominated to the Supreme Court by Nixon, was confirmed by a Senate vote of 94 to 0. Nobody could find anything controversial, or even interesting, about Harry Blackmun. "Wild About Harry" is Robert P. George's review of the *New York Times*' Linda Greenhouse's new biography *Becoming Harry Blackmun*. Blackmun became a very interesting person when he wrote *Roe v. Wade*. He became, as Greenhouse puts it, an "improbable icon" of what she and her paper persistently call "abortion rights." After *Roe*, Father Vern Trocinski, an old Minnesota friend, wrote Blackmun expressing his serious problems with the decision. Blackmun assured him of his "abhorrence" of abortion, explaining that "The Court's task is to pass only on the narrow issue of constitutionality." It was precisely a lack of basis in the text, structure, or history of the Constitution that led also distinguished liberal scholars in the legal academy, such as Archibald Cox and John Hart Ely, to deplore the decision. Robert George continues: "And then

there is that business about Blackmun finding abortion to be 'abhorrent.' What is abhorrent about it? We ordinarily don't regard medical procedures as abhorrent. There is nothing abhorrent about an appendectomy or tonsillectomy. In the case of abortion, could it be the little matter of hacking off limbs, suctioning out body parts, and reassembling them to make sure that no parts of the baby (oops! I mean fetus) are left inside the mother (oops! I mean woman) to cause infection? I suppose that really is abhorrent in ways that appendectomies and tonsillectomies are not. Then again, perhaps Justice Blackmun and I are just squeamish. As Greenhouse points out, Blackmun in *Roe* seemed to vacillate between understanding the abortion right as the right of a woman to exercise a species of personal liberty and seeing it as the right of her doctor to make a decision about her health. His official, quasi-doctrinal statement in the opinion was that it is a right of the woman in consultation with her doctor. The pro-abortion feminists who came to lionize Justice Blackmun didn't much like the bit about the doctor. For them, abortion was a matter of liberty (or 'autonomy'), not a medical matter. Eventually, they brought Blackmun round to their way of seeing things. This, too, was part of his redemption. In accepting their applause, he stopped talking about doctors. And he got very quiet indeed about his abhorrence of what is done to a human being developing *in utero* when women exercise the sacred right he vouchsafed unto them."

■ "These are without doubt the years of the liberal. Almost everyone so describes himself." So said John Kenneth Galbraith in 1964. Last fall at the Plaza, three hundred admirers of Galbraith and Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. gathered to remember the way it used to be. "Investing in Conservative Ideas," an essay by James Piereson of the John M. Olin Foundation, which is now spending itself out of business, begins with that vignette. It reminds us, he says, "of the precarious and temporary nature of intellectual influence." A long time ago, conservatism was, in the words of Lionel Trilling, "irritable mental gestures seeking to resemble ideas." But something new was afoot, and Piereson traces it to the publication of F.A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* in 1944. A few philanthropists supported Hayek and others who devastatingly criticized socialism and championed "liberalism" in the European meaning of the term (sometimes tending to libertarianism in this country). Then appeared those who would be called neoconservatives, people formerly on the left who wanted to reform rather than abolish the welfare state and who took much more seriously the cultural, moral, and religious

dimensions of social order. Now simply called conservatives (the label “neoconservative” having gravitated for a time to Bush’s foreign policy circle) their purpose, said Irving Kristol, was “to show the American people that they are right and the intellectuals are wrong.” Today, as many liberals lament, conservatives enjoy a near monopoly on ideas for the ordering of society. Powerfully contributing to this remarkable turn were the suicidal impulses of liberalism and the Democratic Party, as evident in everything associated with the “McGovern revolution” of the 1970s and in the decision to bypass electoral politics by achieving change through the courts and government regulation (*Roe v. Wade*, quota systems, school bussing). But essential to the change were a few philanthropists who understood the power of ideas. In his *Commentary* essay Piereson writes: “All this was accomplished with modest financial resources—amazingly modest when compared with the spending of their liberal counterparts. In one recent year, the five leading liberal philanthropic organizations—the Ford, Rockefeller, and MacArthur foundations, the Pew Trusts, and the Carnegie Corporation—reported combined assets of \$24 billion and annual expenditures of \$1.2 billion. By contrast, the combined assets of the five largest conservative foundations do not exceed \$1.5 billion, and their annual expenditures barely reach \$100 million. Yet they were able to achieve a great deal with focus and discipline, and by allying themselves with an unusually talented generation of writers and scholars.” The battle of ideas continues, but it is not evident that there is a new generation of conservative philanthropists who understand “the precarious and temporary nature of intellectual influence.” Perhaps some time soon the likes of Ford, Rockefeller, and Pew will want to be part of what has become, outside the playgrounds of the academy, the mainstream of public intellectual life in America. For the present, however, they are still at the Plaza with John Kenneth Galbraith and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.

■ A lifetime ago, Presbyterian Eugene Carson Blake was general secretary of the National Council of Churches. He was known as “Mr. Protestant” and was as close as the mainline/oldline churches had to a pope. One day I introduced him to a young fellow named Jim Wallis, noting that he was an evangelical Protestant. I’m not sure that Blake had ever seen one in captivity. “It may take a little time,” said Blake to Wallis, “but you’ll soon be on our side.” It did not take much time at all. Wallis was soon publishing the *Post-American*, later to become *Sojourners*, and was in the 1970s a rave hit among many younger evangelicals. Then he faded from the scene for a couple of decades, only to be

picked up by the left wing of the Democratic party after their electoral disaster of 2004 in order to certify their sympathy for “religious values.” His book, *God’s Politics*, was on the bestseller list for weeks, successfully pandering to the conceit of many that their politics are “beyond left and right.” Their partisanship is, quite simply and uncomplicatedly, “biblical.” Dean Curry, who teaches at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania, and was as a student a Wallis enthusiast, reflects on his return. “Recently, however, my amusement has given way to alarm, as it has become clear that Wallis and his agenda are no passing intellectual fad. The sad reality is that anti-Western, anti-American, anti-capitalist, and anti-Israeli biases infuse the academic culture of many evangelical Christian college campuses. Fueled by a professoriate that embraces the same leftist agenda as that of their colleagues in the secular academy, these Christian professors are making great strides in reorienting the political leanings of the coming generation of evangelical leaders. The resurrection of the evangelical left is real, and its influence is growing. And make no mistake about it: The second coming of Jim Wallis has played an important role in all this.”

■ A reader sends a full-page advertisement from the *Chicago Sun-Times* promoting Steve Munsey’s “Jesus of Nazareth” at the Family Christian Center in Muncie, Indiana. Among the promised features of the production: “Revised Script,” “Waterfalls,” “1000 Cast Members,” and “Camels, Horses, Sheep.” What really caught my attention, however, was the invitation to “Discover how God can heal you, extend your life, and destroy your enemies!” That’s an offer hard to refuse.

■ This is weird. Cinephiles of a certain age will remember Woody Allen’s *Sleeper*, in which a totalitarian government of the future is about to clone its dead Great Leader. The body part chosen for the cloning was the nose. Now Reuters reports that researchers at Australia’s Griffith University have discovered that multi-potent stem cells can be obtained from inside the nose of adult human beings. Says head researcher Alan Mackay-Sim, “Apart from neural and brain cells, they look like they can turn into blood cells, heart muscles, and skeletal muscle.” What did Woody Allen know back in 1973?

■ Americans are brash, arrogant, and aggressive, while Canadians are polite, modest, and somewhat introverted. Such are the stereotypes that sustain a major industry in Canada: Defining “Canadian identity,” which means explaining why Canadians are different from Americans. But now the Canadian Press reports

on a big study involving thousands of people in 49 countries. "In a measure of five main areas of personality, covering a total of 30 traits, Canadians and their U.S. cousins fell roughly in the middle. Not only that, but they weren't all that different from other cultures around the globe, researchers found." It appears the researchers have discovered human nature. That should be worth a Nobel Prize.

■ In response to my recent reflection on Santayana (FT February), Judge John T. Noonan of the Ninth Circuit sends along a verse by Wallace Stevens with which I was not familiar. Stevens was a student of Santayana and titled the poem, "To An Old Philosopher in Rome."

*The threshold, Rome, and that more merciful
Rome
Beyond, the two alike in the make of the mind.
It is as if in a human dignity
Two parallels become one, a perspective, of which
Men are part both in the inch and in the mile.*

As Judge Noonan says, none of us can know the final state of Santayana's soul but, if there is salvation by perspective . . .

■ Now for something not completely different but different enough. If you have not already discovered it, you might go to the FT website for "Observations and Contentions." There you will find more or less daily postings on all and sundry by Joseph Bottum and myself, with occasional interventions by others associated with the magazine. As though we didn't have enough to do. But it is, not incidentally, an effective way of inviting new subscribers.

■ The struggle to keep Christ in Christmas never ends. The Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine up on Morningside Heights is doing its part. They have a twenty-eight-foot-tall metal spiral sculpture

that is a "Tree of Sounds" as part of the Winter Solstice Celebration. "This popular secular event," it says here, "celebrates the ancient traditions from which Christmas has evolved." Any other questions about the true meaning of Christmas?

■ It is a thing of beauty, and compels one to wonder why it has not been done before. I don't say it has never been done, but I had not seen it done. It is a card from the Sisters of the Mississippi Valley with a cartoon-like icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary comforting an obviously distressed Eve. Following the words to the serpent in Genesis 3, the serpent is entwined around Eve's leg and heel while Mary stands on the serpent's head. Mary is speaking to Eve:

*My mother, my daughter, life-giving Eve,
Do not be ashamed, do not grieve.
The former things have passed away,
Our God has brought us to a New Day.
See, I am with Child,
Through whom all will be reconciled.
O Eve! My sister, my friend,
We will rejoice together
Forever
Life without end.*

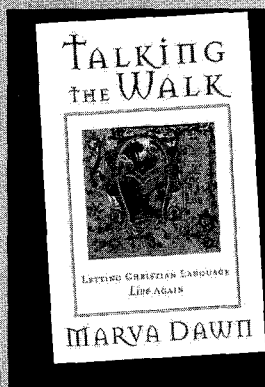
Once seen, the theme seems so obvious. I asked Jeanne Nuechterlein, an art historian at the University of York, to check into it. (Yes, she's the daughter of our former editor.) While, of course, the juxtaposing of Eve and Mary (the New Eve) goes back at least to St. Jerome, an actual encounter between the two, never mind one in which Mary is consoling Eve, apparently does not appear. Gertrud Schiller's authoritative *Ikonographie der Christlichen Kunst* provides no such representation. It seems possible that, after all these centuries of the Church's reflection on the place of Eve and Mary in the story of salvation, the Sisters of the Mississippi Valley have come up with something quite new, movingly suggestive, and entirely orthodox.

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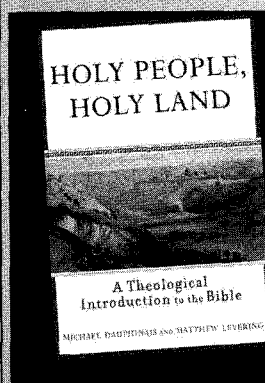
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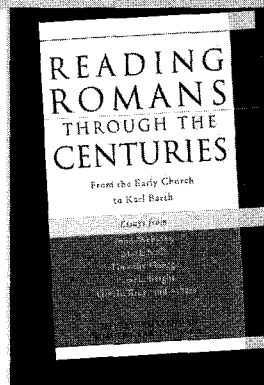
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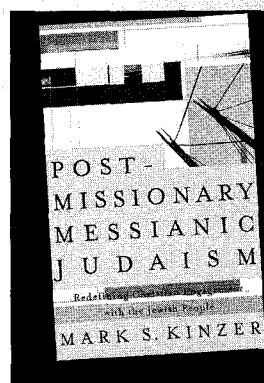


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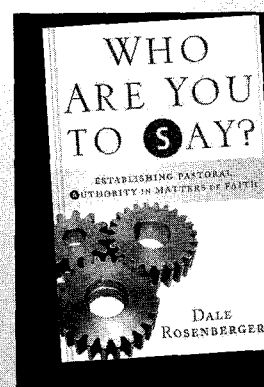


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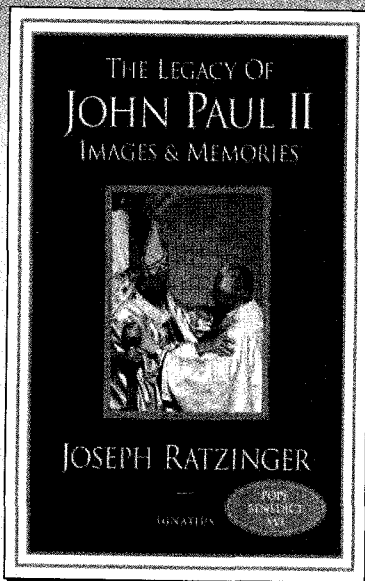
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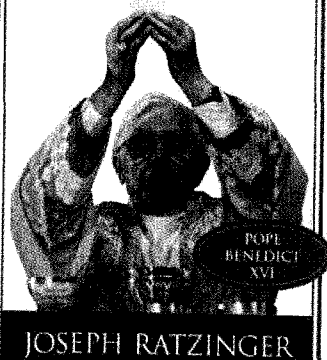
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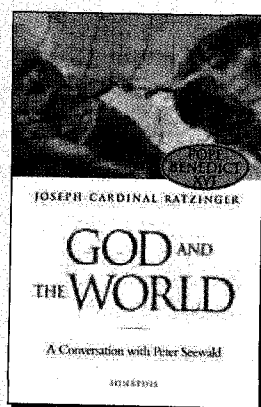
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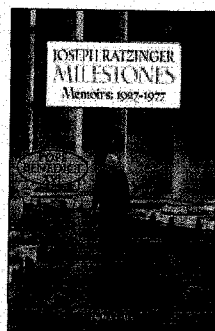
is quite different, demanding and bold. The Jesus who makes everything OK for everyone is a phantom, a dream, not a real figure. The Christ of the Gospels is certainly not convenient for us. But it is precisely in this way that he answers the deepest questions of our existence, which keeps us on the lookout for God, for a happiness that is infinite. We must again set out on the way to this real Jesus."

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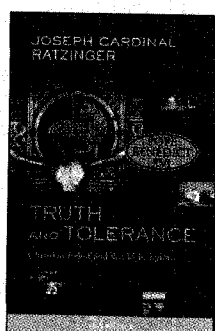
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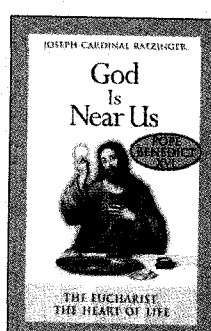
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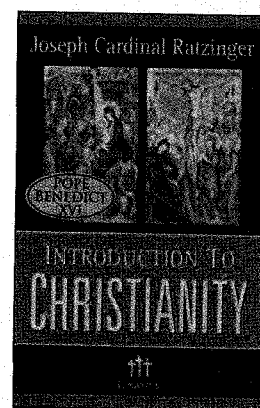
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